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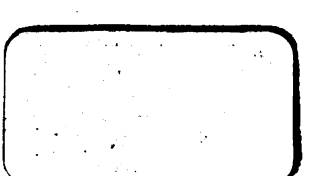

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E 3

He clutched the dripping garments, and tried to steady the slight frame.

Frontispiece. Page 308.

MASTER WILBERFORCE

A Study of a Boy

By "RITA"

AUTHOR OF "PEG THE RAKE," "A WOMAN IN IT," ETC. ETC.

LONDON
HUTCHINSON & CO.
34 PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.
1895

Dedication.

TO "BERTIE."

It has often occurred to me that the Boy has suffered much at the hands of historians and romancists. With some knowledge of his capacity for other things besides mischief and insubordination, and a respectful admiration for the many-sidedness of his character, I dedicate these pages to Him.

AUTHOR.

BOOK THE FIRST.

THE BUD.

MASTER WILBERFORCE.

CHAPTER I.

A SCHEME.

"WE will bring him up," said Mrs. Horatius Wilberforce, "on entirely new principles."

"Pardon me," interrupted the Professor, removing his spectacles, and gazing with eyes of unconcealed pride at the small specimen of humanity, aged three years, who was contemplating him reflectively from the hearthrug. "Pardon me, my dear. We will not bring him up at all."

"Not—bring—him—up—at all!" echoed Mrs. Wilberforce, with a gasp between each word. She was a small, nervous woman, and often gasped at her husband's extraordinary statements. She had an unbounded admiration for his genius, and a sense of humility as regarded her own short-

comings, which was very feminine, and would have called forth the animadversions of the shrieking sisterhood.

In Mrs. Wilberforce's opinion the husband was the head of the house in every sense, Ruler, Master, Superior—all emphasised in her own mind by capital letters. If at any time in her meek life she had felt the stirring of rebellion, it had been when, after ten years of matrimonial felicity, there had suddenly burst upon her the wonderful fact of new claims, new interests, and a brief undivided responsibility. This important change was due to the advent of a small, beefy specimen of humanity, whose lungs uttered continual protest against the unwelcome burden of physical laws, whose appetite was abnormal, and whose personal appearance was decidedly unprepossessing. But with the importance of motherhood there had sprung up in her breast all that tenderness, patience, and self-effacement which lend something of divinity to the tie, and make of woman at once a martyr and a heroine.

This small, quaint, peremptory being was all her own; Nature's gift, with the stamp of Heaven's Mint on its sinless soul; something so weak, and helpless, and appealing, that she needs must love and pity, as well as marvel at it. For its sake she did battle against the Professor's daring

theories, which had a strong bias in the direction of cold-water ablutions at the earliest period of life, and without regard to seasons; also the neces-

sity of a cereal diet to be rigorously administered at stated hours, without deference to infantile opinions on the subject, or infantile powers of digestion.

Natural history informs us that even the feeblest and most timorous female thing will do battle for its young, so when Mrs. Horatius ruffled her puny plumes, and lifted her meek voice bravely in defence of feminine judgment, the Professor was so astonished that he desisted from further interference.

For the first two years of Master Wilberforce's life he was, therefore, yielded up to old-established nursery doctrines, and grew strong, wiry, and fairly presentable in consequence. Not that he had the smallest claims to juvenile beauty. Far from it. His hair was lank and straight, his complexion pasty, his forehead too broad for symmetry with the lower portion of his face. Certainly his eyes redeemed these defects; they were large and full, dark grey as to hue, well set, and well fringed with black lashes. The small chin betokened firmness, and the mouth, though somewhat pale, was prettily curved, albeit too grave in expression for his childish years.

He had now arrived at the mature age of three, and could talk intelligently, and walk at an average pace—two accomplishments which placed him in high favour with the Professor—in whose sight infantile growth was a very slow and uninteresting process.

He had also begun to regard his small personality as important, and to question the why and wherefore of his environment, and its manifold comforts and burdens. It occurred to him that there was considerably too much dressing, and washing, and "cleaning up" going on in his immediate neighbourhood, and that buttons and strings could only have been invented as a test for juvenile strength, or to prove the uniform badness of all brands of sewing-cotton.

He would have preferred to be without garments that depended on such inadequate attachments, but his nurse and his mother held different opinions. He was obliged therefore to content himself with giving them opportunities of testing the cotton, and assisted his theories by the judicious use of scissors, when they were too much engaged to notice his actions.

Master Wilberforce could talk very well, and could listen even better. By dint of keeping his ears very wide open, and practising in private any word that particularly took his fancy, he had acquired a very effective and advanced vocabulary of his own.

It was true he did not always place his expressions in correct analogy to his sentence, but as far as sound went they were tremendous.

He tried their effect on Nurse Doldrum, and the

result was quite up to his expectation. Then he let them off like signal rockets in course of conversation with his parents. The consequences were almost fatal as far as his mother was concerned. She nearly choked herself by gasping for breath during the period of early dinner.

Master Wilberforce had informed his father that he intended to keep to a fish and vegetable diet, as they "made brains." He further asserted that meat gave him indigestion.

The Professor listened gravely. It occurred to him that his son would prove a very uncommon boy—decidedly an original one. It was this conclusion that gave rise to the decision already mentioned. Master Wilberforce was to be left to the purely natural culture of his own genius.

For genius he undoubtedly possessed. Otherwise how could one account for a child of three—and a male child, too—acting in direct contradiction to all previous traditions, and dieting himself on hygienic principles, instead of requiring medical authority to prove their necessity?

As he listened now to his father's dictum, Master Wilberforce thrust his hands into his knickerbocker pockets, planted his legs firmly on the hearthrug, and nodded approval.

"I will," he said, "so help me God!"

It was the Professor's turn to gasp now. He

was used to strange speeches and stranger remarks on the part of the juvenile prodigy, but this seemed somewhat too forcible for the occasion.

"My son," he exclaimed, "where did you hear such an expression?"

"Jim says it. I heard him tell Tom the coachman it was the form of an oath—'to speak the

truth, and nothing but the truth.' Jim s'posed it must be awful difficult to speak truth, or they wouldn't need ask God to help them, but just do it."

"My dear," said Mrs. Wilberforce, "I have before now desired you not to go to the stables and associate with the stable boys. Their language is far from—correct, and their manners are dreadful."

"Are my manners—k'rect?" inquired Master Wilberforce.

"For your age, certainly," answered his mother with beaming pride.

"Then I'd best teach Jim and Tom how to behave," he remarked. "I don't see how they're to learn if no one takes the trouble to tell them."

The Professor, with due regard to his new system, observed that example was after all a very excellent system of education, but that he did not advise it to take the form of too close association with inferiors.

Master Wilberforce "posed" him at once by inquiring who were "inferiors," and further, why they were "inferiors"; and being informed on these two points, wandered off into a categorical list of every one he knew or had heard of, in order to place them in their proper position. By the time he had exhausted the subject he had also

exhausted his father's patience. He was then summarily dismissed to his nursery, where he proceeded to inform Nurse Doldrum that she was an "inferior," and he was going to set her an example.

"Lor' bless and save the child, where do he pick up such words?" exclaimed his attendant admiringly.

She adored him, for the reason that appeals most strongly to a nurse's heart—he had been extremely difficult to rear. Every month of his infantile existence had been a milestone of wonder erected in the passage towards childhood. It was a triumph of womanly care and tenderness, and as such, deserved to be recorded.

According to Nurse Doldrum, such a wonderful child as Master Wilberforce had never gladdened home or heart. The opinion is not exceptional. Nurses and mothers can still distinguish that special degree of "blackness" which has passed into a proverb with the maternal crow, who deems her individual offspring a degree more ebonised than her neighbour's. Accordingly, when her nursling proposed to educate her by "example," and further informed her he was "to be letted grow up how he liked," Nurse Doldrum attempted no argument on the matter, but accepted the information with her usual cheerfulness. She was a

middle-aged woman, with a face like a hard ripe apple, and wonderfully black hair elaborately oiled and smoothed until it resembled a well-polished grate.

"Who told you all this, my dear?" she inquired at last, when Master Wilberforce had apparently exhausted all the long words he could think of.

"Nobody," was the prompt reply; "I thoughted it all for myself."

His nurse surveyed him in astonishment. He was seated in a high cane chair, his small legs kicking the bars emphatically, by way of accentuating his remarks.

"Lor', now, what a clever dear it is!" said his nurse. "No wonder his pa is proud of him!"

She did not pay much attention to his announcement of "growing up as he liked." It was a little difficult to believe, for the Professor was a learned man, and greatly esteemed in the world of science, and having attained the ripe age of fifty, must surely know what was best to do with his son.

His mother was only a few years younger than her husband. It was, therefore, not surprising that Master Wilberforce had come into the world with a certain staid and old-fashioned demeanour, and a tendency towards acquiring information of every description. Observation was a stimulus to mental

exercise, and facts, as represented, soon appeared to differ materially from facts as they were.

Contradictions perpetually baffle the faith of childhood, and make too large demands on its credulity.

Master Wilberforce appeared to have come into the world with a perpetual "Why" on his tongue. This threatened to be an unpleasant failing, and to lay too great demand on the mental activity of those who were concerned in his welfare. It was dangerous to tell him truth, but it was positive peril to attempt fictional representation of any facts or circumstances that came under his notice.

Nurse Doldrum had a theory respecting him to the effect that for a year of his life he had listened and observed in comparative silence. They had imagined he was backward in talking, whereas he was only waiting until talking represented less difficulty than the infant tongue usually surmounts by the intelligent aid of female interpreters.

The male intellect has always been baffled by such phonetic eccentricities.

According to this theory, Master Wilberforce was only desirous of being perfect in an accomplishment before its public attempt. A very wise proceeding on his part, and one to be recommended to the notice of many older members of the great human family.

For it is a curious fact that we, old and wise as we deem ourselves, can yet learn much from little children—more, I often think, than we teach them.

Perhaps it is because they come to us fresh from the Mint of Heaven, God's own stamp of purity and truth upon their innocent brows. Alas! how soon we let them lose it—we who think ourselves so far above them in intelligence!

CHAPTER II.

DEVELOPMENT.

THE Professor's dictum had gone forth, and a watchful household awaited results. How could a child—least of all, a boy—bring itself up?

The mental and physical development of Master Wilberforce promised interesting consequences. A pictorial alphabet which his mother had presented to him was artfully put in his way, and when he was observed studying it, Nurse Doldrum plumed herself on the fact. She took out her needlework and suggested an explanation of the pretty pictures. Master Wilberforce considered the point for a moment or two, then deposited the book on her lap, planted his legs firmly on the hearthrug, thrust his hands into his pockets, and demanded:

"What's 'A'?"

"'A,'" said Nurse Doldrum, glancing at the page, "'A' was an Archer and shot—"

"Stop," said Master Wilberforce peremptorily.

"It's a man in the picture. Why don't you say so?"

"A man and an archer, my dear," she said persuasively. "'A' stands for both."

"That's silly," he said. "'A' is only a letter; one thing can't mean two things. What are letters for?"

"To teach you to read—letters make words, you know."

"Who made letters?" was the next query.

This was altogether above the head of the poor Doldrum. She had learnt letters and put them together, and had her education conducted on approved National School principles, but how letters came to be letters, and who first thought of reducing the elements of sound into visible form, she could not state with any degree of authority.

"Well, well, my dear, what does it matter?" she answered. "Wise people, I suppose, got the notion of making them. There couldn't be no books without letters, you know."

Master Wilberforce reflected in silence, then turned to the alphabet once more.

"What comes next?" he demanded.

Nurse Doldrum announced that "B" followed suit, and represented a "Butcher who had a big dog."

"If 'B' means butcher," argued the young

scholar, "why don't they say 'B' has called for orders? How can a letter mean a long word like that?"

He pointed contemptuously to the page.

Nurse gave it up in despair, and said he had best look at the pictures for himself.

"No; I want to read books," he answered, "and so I must learn the letters, All the same, it's very stupid. Why don't they say 'A for a' and 'B for b'? What's the good of putting in archers and butchers? Now go on and tell me all through."

She obeyed, and conducted the alphabet in triumph down to Z. To her astonishment he repeated every letter correctly after her. But he stopped her praises with fine contempt.

"I only remember them," he said. "I don't know them. I'm going to get the look of them into my head now."

He forthwith marched off with the book, and for three days studied it on his own principles. At the expiration of that time he had mastered every letter with a scornful rejection of pictorial aid.

The Professor was informed of this fact in admiring ejaculations by the fond mother, and accepted it with the dignity of an assured faith in his own theory.

"Bring him to me when he can read a sentence," he commanded, and then shut himself up again in the company of scientific tomes, retorts, and chemicals.

Spurred on by ambition, Master Wilberforce enlisted his mother in his service and worked hard. When he had mastered, not one, but half a page of sentences, he walked into the Professor's study, book in hand, and demanded to be heard.

The Professor looked at the small figure, the resolute face, and declared himself ready to listen.

He nodded approval, patted the close-cropped head, and bade him go on as he had begun.

When he was alone, he proceeded to think out a plan of education compatible with the theory of self up-bringing.

It was not an easy matter, and the process of "thinking out" promised to be long enough to permit of Master Wilberforce's reaching years of discretion ere it was thoroughly evolved. Unconscious of the process, the boy meanwhile marched enthusiastically along the path of intellectual development, threaded the mazes of spelling and grammar, treated geography as a pastime, and played with figures as other boys with tops and marbles. He accepted instruction from his mother till he had reached the venerable age of seven.

Then he demanded a holiday, and proceeded to indulge in natural sports and pastimes in company with a neighbouring youth, grandson of a certain elderly baronet of ill repute and vast estates. This friendship sprang up with a mushroom suddenness. The two boys were of directly opposite types—types that threatened antagonism more than intimacy—yet in some curious and inexplicable manner they succumbed to the law of attraction. It represented a subtle and not altogether unpleasant element, productive at first of skirmishing and fisticuffs, and gradually toning down to exploits in which mischief and risk were equally associated.

In all comradeship there must be a leader. By right of physical power and daring, Dick Jarvis claimed that position. Yet ingenuity and intelligence ran him closely in the race for superiority, and the skill in planning an enterprise often brought the younger boy the grudging acknowledgment of the elder when success had crowned it. Their elders were in no way acquainted with this alliance. A certain amount of liberty was granted to one and claimed by the other. It was put to various uses. The thrilling delight of adventures inspired by fiction, and largely coloured by imagination, now usurped Master Wilberforce's spare hours, and in an absolute realism of detail left little to be desired. Early history, both

sacred and secular, formed safe ground of procedure, and but for the unfailing secrecy of the two conspirators would have had startling effects upon the neighbourhood.

Dick appeared to have a considerable amount of liberty, and being active and intelligent he found himself impelled to employ it with corresponding activity. Master Wilberforce was an accidental discovery, but though his junior by two years he found him a source of interest and perpetual wonder. He initiated him into the mysteries of bird-nesting, rabbit-snaring, fishing, and rat-hunting. He taught him to appreciate the delights of tame pets; and jackdaws and white mice were speedily introduced into an apartment hitherto known as Master Wilberforce's study, and took their place among book-shelves and mechanical toys. It had originally been the day nursery.

Nurse Doldrum had long been deposed from her position as attendant, and toilet details were no longer mysteries to the boy's active fingers. In this "den," as he termed it, he spent most of his time, reading insatiably when alone, and listening to and marvelling at his new friend's experiences or suggestions on more sociable occasions. He had confided to Dick that he was to "bring himself up," and that youth marvelled in no small degree

at the announcement. The name and fame of Professor Wilberforce were well known. Dick had often heard his grandmother, and a lady whom he designated as Grand-aunt Grizel, speak of him. The Professor had retired from active life, but his occasional articles to scientific journals were always welcomed, and largely quoted; and his books had brought him considerable notoriety. It certainly seemed odd to young Dick that the son of so learned and important a person should be allowed to grow up on such free-and-easy principles. With regard to himself, he had all a natural boy's horror of books and learning, and his one idea of school was to avoid it. That his juvenile friend should actually like books and spend hours in their perusal was a mystery unfathomable. He did his best to prove the folly of such proceedings, and failing in that, endeavoured to counteract them by judicious temptations of a totally opposed nature. Master Wilberforce was not cruel, but he was curious, and he suffered himself to be allured by the bait of "natural history."

As time went on, a certain amount of daring crept into schemes hitherto harmless, and adventure bristled on all sides of them.

Moonlight escapades became frequent, and many a night when Master Wilberforce was supposed to be wrapped in the happy serenity of youthful

slumbers, he was in reality scouring the country round with his adventurous companion, and revelling in the imaginary deeds and risks of a robber, a brigand, or a smuggler. They had a secret cave, stored with unique supplies in the way of apples, dried fruit, biscuits, and dark lanterns, not to mention such trifles as coils of rope, empty barrels, and toy guns and cannons. Here they spent many a delirious midnight hour watching for impossible

enemies, and gazing out at tranquil seas with equally impossible spy-glasses, in the expectation of sighting pirate vessels or smuggling craft.

The instincts of the boy are invariably the same, and the proclivities of Master Wilberforce manifested, at this time, no decided originality. His brain was abnormally active, and his imagination rioted in pictures of magnificent achievements, but in actual deeds he followed his leader. The supremacy of physical strength and the daring of a

fearless spirit seemed alike splendid and masterful. He was both too young and too fragile to display any marked courage, but he was far from being cowardly. He put up with unexampled discomforts in order to please his companion; he never backed out of any expedition, or shrank from any hardship dictated by the elder and more daring spirit. He was by nature loyal, and ready to accept unquestioningly commands however irrational. The compact of sworn comradeship was a bond of honour, and he would have suffered any martyrdom sooner than break that bond, or evade one iota of its demands.

Life, at present, was a field of liberty, and in it he wandered uncontrolled. Mind and body expanded with marvellous rapidity, and fed alike on the real and the imaginary; his brain had an active force far in advance of his years. No one had been at hand to recognise or check its exuberant life till the advent of Dick Jarvis. By turning it into a new channel he conferred a benefit which, if open to doubt, at least was less harmful than its previous self-centred culture.

Meanwhile the Professor brooded over an educational scheme in the solitude of his study, and his wife knitted stockings for her darling, and wove into heel and toe a thousand tender motherly hopes, and fears, and ambitions. A

mother's love is not the wisdom of the head, but of the heart. It may not be the highest form, but it often is the truest.

One night she was knitting in placid content. Her boy was still to her a child, still something to be cared for, watched, and tended. Love spiritualised her feelings, and yet lent them active employment.

His creature comforts, his simple wants meant still so much to her.

She thought of him asleep, dreamless, warm, content. The thought became strangely alluring, and the click of the knitting-needles suddenly ceased. She laid down the stocking and stole softly upstairs, and through dimly-lit corridors.

She entered the sacred room, dark, save for transient gleams of moonlight. The white blind surged to and fro. A fear of night air and prejudicial results drew her eyes to the window. It was open. Then they turned to the low iron bed. It was vacant. The pillow was unpressed; no carelessly flung garments indicated that the process of "undressing" had been a process of to-night's supposed retirement.

Her heart stood still in sudden fear. Thoughts of child-stealers, gipsies, and such-like lawless beings flashed in wild confusion through a brain whose equilibrium had been suddenly overthrown. She rushed from the room, calling on the faithful Doldrum to share her discovery and assist in suggestions.

CHAPTER III.

AN EPISODE.

THE advent of a circus in the neighbouring town, distant some three miles from Broomville, the Professor's residence, had thrown Master Wilberforce into a state of unwonted excitement.

There is not the slightest doubt that if he had communicated this fact to his parents, or expressed a wish to behold the glories of such an entertainment, they would have allowed him to witness it. Instead of doing this, however, he confided merely in Dick, and Dick forthwith planned a nocturnal excursion for both, with the skill and care of a general conducting a sortie against an unsuspecting foe.

Hence the vacant bedchamber and the unoccupied bed.

It was a warm moonlit night in June. Master Wilberforce, having yawned conspicuously several times as a hint of approaching sleepiness, betook himself to his own room at the hour of seven. Five minutes later he had made his now accus-

tomed exit through the window, slipped into the shrubbery, and joined his friend at the corner of the high-road skirting the park of Sir Richard Jarvis.

Both the boys were full of excitement. A circus was still a mystery. No opportunity had as yet been afforded to either to witness such a performance. They arranged to get into the two-penny seats. It was to commence at eight, so they ran most of the way, and reached the huge tent, ablaze with naphtha lights, just as the procession was filing in.

It seemed a splendid sight to the two boys. Two and two they rode, men and women side by side, on prancing steeds ridden without stirrups, and apparently mastered by the merest touch.

The glitter of spangles and velvet, the gorgeous colouring of dresses, the beauty of the horses, and the jests of the clown, entranced Master Wilberforce. It was a spectacle so novel, and as yet so utterly unimagined. Pirates, and highwaymen, and smugglers he was acquainted with, but his imagination had not yet touched the borderland of sawdust and spangles.

Breathless he sat there, drinking in every detail, hanging on every foolish jest. The riding, the tricks of the animals, the marvels of the trapezists on their wire, the dexterity of the damsels flying

through hoops as their steeds went at full gallop round the ring, all amazed and delighted him. He gazed on a new world, and the glitter and attractiveness were all he could distinguish. Of any darker side to it he was happily unconscious, and when the curtain fell at last on thunders of applause, and the vast audience streamed out into the quiet night, he felt dazed and bewildered by the sights and sounds of the past two hours.

It was close on half-past ten when the boys found themselves free of the crowd, and hurrying along the homeward road.

They took a short cut through a narrow lane, popularly supposed to be haunted, and therefore avoided after nightfall by the country people round. Dick knew of its reputation, but fear of the unknown had no place in his active brain. Ghosts and bogies were only old nurses' tales to frighten little children in the nursery. He did not inform his young companion of the evil legend, but held his small hand firmly, and hurried him on at a pace that tried both his legs and breathing powers considerably.

Half-way through the lane, where the light was hardly visible through overhanging boughs, he suddenly paused.

"Horry," he said in a startled voice, "what's that?"

Master Wilberforce gave his best attention to sounds apart from his own panting breaths, and acknowledged there was something, he couldn't say what—crying or singing, he thought. They

moved slowly on a few paces. The lane curved abruptly, and grew even narrower as it passed between the dark high hedgerows. Suddenly Dick paused again.

"Look!" he exclaimed, and pointed ahead.

Master Wilberforce obeyed, and peered into the darkness. He saw a small white object seated on the ground. It was making an odd crooning noise, and playing with something that turned out presently to be wild flowers.

"It's a pixie. Let's run," said Dick, his face turning pale.

"It's a child," said Master Wilberforce authoritatively, and releasing his arm from his companion's clutch. "I'm not going to run," he added, and advanced towards the small figure. A gleam of moonlight streamed across the cloudy dusk, and lit up a tiny, dark face, a mass of tangled curls, and two large, startled eyes, that changed suddenly from fear to friendliness.

Then a voice proceeded from the ground.

"I'm losted," it said. "Will you find me?"

"There—I said it wasn't a pixie!" announced Master Wilberforce. "Poor little thing! Lost, are you? Where did you come from?"

The small atom gave no response. It staggered on to its bare feet, a ragged, dirty, poverty-stricken waif, and peered curiously into the boy's face.

"I'm losted," it said again.

"So it seems," said Dick, recovering his usual courage. "Goodness, how could she have come here of all places? What are we to do?"

Master Wilberforce shook his head. The

"It's a pixie! Let's run," said Dick, his face turning pale.

situation was perplexing, to say the least of it.

"We can't leave her here," he said. "I wonder to whom she belongs?"

"Where's your mother?" asked Dick, cutting the Gordian knot of speculation with startling abruptness.

The child only seized Master Wilberforce's hand and drew closer to him. Once more she repeated that old formula which served to convey her present situation: "I'm losted."

"She evidently likes you; you ask her name," suggested Dick. "It's getting jolly late," he added.

"We can't leave her here all night. I wonder if she'd come home with me?" said Master Wilberforce.

He put the interrogation, and was rewarded by a ready assent. The little creature tightened her hold on his hand, and turned at once in the same direction.

"Can she ever walk it, do you think, Dick?" asked the young knight-errant, with a compassionate glance at the tiny bare feet.

"Well, she'll have to, unless you like to carry her."

"No shoes, poor little thing," continued the boy. "How could she have strayed here, I wonder? Will you tell me your name?" he asked, stooping over the curly head beside him.

"I'se Mehatabel," came the ready response.

"Mehatabel. What a rum name! How well she says it!" exclaimed Dick. "What else?" he asked, in the hopes of elucidating a clue to her rightful owners.

The dark, fiery eyes glanced unresponsively at him.

"That's all 'tis," she said.

"What on earth will you do when you get her home?" asked Dick anxiously of his companion. "It'll let the cat out of the bag if you say you weren't in your room. Will they leather you?"

"I'm never touched," said the boy proudly. "My father says I'm to have an independent training."

"Oh, that's all very well till he finds out you're up to larks like this," said Dick, "and that kid will let out where she met you."

"They won't mind," asserted Master Wilberforce. "I'll say I wanted to see what a circus was like."

"Where'll you put her to-night?" continued Dick, to whom the freedom and peculiarity of his friend's education were a perpetual source of envy.

"In my bed, I think, and I'll sleep on the floor. I can take a blanket and pillow off, and that'll do first-rate."

"She's lagging awfully," said Dick. "We sha'n't get home till midnight at this rate."

"Take her on your back," suggested Master

Wilberforce, and after a slight struggle or two on the part of the distressed damsel, this mode of transit was effected.

At the park Dick had to turn off through a

private entrance of his own manufacture, and then Master Wilberforce remained sole defender of the young wanderer. He, too, had a secret exit from the grounds of Broomville, and through this he

pushed his way, and assisted the child. As he came in sight of the house, however, he paused, and gazed in disconcerted wonder at the flashing lights, the open doors and windows, and general alertness of its usually sleepy aspect.

Evidently the household were up and astir. Had his absence been discovered, he wondered?

After a moment's consideration he marched up to the front entrance. The door stood wide open. He saw his mother sitting on a chair in the hall, weeping bitterly. The Professor stood by her side in his old velvet dressing-gown and smoking-cap, a look of placid bewilderment on his face. From time to time he would pat her shoulder consolingly. The action was eloquent, and Master Wilberforce recognised its meaning. He quickened his pace and ran lightly up the broad flight of steps, holding the child's hand still firmly clasped.

As they reached the open door the Professor caught sight of them. He uttered an exclamation, and his hand ceased its ministrations. Mrs Wilberforce raised her head, and joy alone was in the startled cry that escaped her lips. She was on her feet and the boy was in her arms before the Professor had fully realised his vicinity. Then followed a torrent of ejaculations, thanks-givings, queries, all betraying the emotional side

of maternity in striking contrast to paternal self-control. Master Wilberforce waived aside the necessity of explanation.

"I got out through my window," he said. "It's an easy jump. I wanted to see the circus. That's all."

All! Little enough, apparently, to have sent common sense, and peace, and self-control adrift in one poor woman's heart, and racked her very soul with anguish and suspense. Sobs spoke of relief. As yet blame or chastisement were not in the curriculum of Master Wilberforce's education. She kissed him and wept over him, as if the dangers of an Ulysses had been his portion. Up to this moment she had not observed his strange companion. The full, deep tones of the Professor's voice cut sharply across her broken words.

"What—have you brought home with you?" he demanded.

The boy suddenly drew himself away from his mother's arms, and turned to look for the waif.

The light flashed on a mass of chestnut curls, the gleam of defiant eyes, the scarlet blossom of a parted mouth. The rest of the picture was completed by rags and dirt. He held out his hand and drew the small, wild thing forward.

"I found it lost in the lane," he said. "Perhaps you can classify it, father."

CHAPTER IV.

CURIOSITY.

IT was a curious scene. The fine old hall, the brilliant glow of light, the tall, quaint figure of the Professor, the slight and old-fashioned one of his wife, and before them the two children, a striking contrast of relative stations of life.

The child gazed at them all with wondering, but in no way timid eyes. She was very small; ragged and unkempt as a savage, but a certain untamed grace and beauty lurked in her tiny form and flashed in her defiant glance.

The Professor adjusted his glasses and surveyed her with solemn disapprobation. It struck him for the first time that the amount of liberty accorded to his son might have occasional awkward results.

Meanwhile he had been asked to classify a mass of picturesque rags, a curly head, and two wild, roving eyes. He proceeded to put the most natural question suggested by such an apparition: "Who are you?" The child shrank closer to her

first protector. The deep, booming voice of the elderly gentleman with those gleaming eyes struck terror to her soul. Master Wilberforce answered for her.

"She was lost," he repeated. "Her name's Mehatabel, she says. I couldn't leave her all alone in the lane. I thought she could have my bed for to-night. I dare say she's hungry too!" he added thoughtfully.

Mrs. Wilberforce recognised this spontaneous outburst of charity as another trait in the character of her wonderful offspring. Her womanly nature went out in a throb of warm pity to the little bare-footed waif. She took her under her wing at once, and kindly suggestions overflowed.

The Professor gladly waived responsibilities. Children of tender years were essentially a woman's charge. The child was lost. His son had found her. Doubtless the morrow would solve the problem of ownership; for to-night, let her be fed and sheltered. He delivered himself of this opinion, and then stalked off to his own study, from whence he had been ruthlessly dragged an hour before to assist in the discovery of the truant.

Meanwhile, Nurse Doldrum had appeared on the scene, and amidst tears, and scoldings, and exclamations, she also had gathered the history of

the lost waif. A brief inspection suggested only one idea—"A bath."

Straightway the small wanderer was conducted to the now disused nursery—the sleeping apartment of the worthy Doldrum. Here, in defiance of a dumb and cat-like struggle, she was divested of her rags, and obliged to submit to the ordeal of soap and water.

The results were little short of marvellous, and the little creature burst forth in a Cupid-like loveliness that won the wondering admiration of her two attendants.

"What a little beauty!" murmured Mrs. Wilberforce, thinking with a faint pang of envy of her own treasure's somewhat bony proportions and sallow skin under similar circumstances. Master Wilberforce had decidedly not been of the Cupid type at any period of infantile existence.

"Yes, she's wonderful well-formed," agreed the old nurse. "Gipsy-looking, though. I wonder who owns her?"

"Oh, we shall easily find that out," said her mistress, producing one of her own boy's discarded night garments, and investing the small stranger in its capacious folds. "Now," she added, "get her some bread and milk, and I'll call Horry in to see her."

She opened the door of the adjoining room, and

called softly to her son. He entered at once, in a state of partial undress. The effects of fatigue, and excitement, and late hours had begun to make themselves felt.

He stared at the little fairy on his mother's lap with gratifying astonishment.

"Why, she looks quite a new sort of child!" he exclaimed.

The little creature slid away from her kindly shelter, and rushed at him with every mark of passionate delight. So fiercely did the small hands cling, and the beautiful wild eyes plead, that the boy found it impossible to withstand their power. He let her sit on his knee, and watched her devour her bread and milk, though he was tired and sleepy, and only longing for bed.

Then arose a new difficulty. Nurse Doldrum wished to put the child into the old cot that had once been occupied by her own charge. But vain were efforts or persuasions. She would not lie down, but climbed cat-like over the low iron rails, and flew to her first protector again and again. No persuasions would induce her to leave him.

At last he suggested wheeling the cot into his room, and placing it beside his own bed. This plan evidently found favour in the child's eyes, and she trotted nimbly after him, and allowed him to

place her in it, after due explanation as to his proximity.

Peace and quiet descended on the household at last. The moon, softly veiled behind grey clouds, ceased to gleam on the window-pane. A soft patter of rain fell on the grass and bathed the flower-beds. The calm, pulseless night held sway in the world around, and two young untutored souls drifted out on the strange sea of dreams, knowing naught as yet of the mystery of Fate, which chooses to link human lives in the chains of circumstance.

The Professor was sadly perturbed. "To-morrow," had brought no clue to the name or owners of the lost child, and many "to-morrows" passed and repassed him in his vain efforts at discovery.

Had she dropped from the clouds she could not have been more utterly lost to any apparent human claims. None of the neighbouring farmers had any knowledge of her. The circus people alike denied right or part in the mystery. Wandering gipsies unearthed here and there and confronted with her could give no clue or offer any suggestion as to modes of identifying her parents. Week after week drifted by and she was

He let her sit on his knee, and watched her devour the bread and milk.

still an inmate of Broomville, and bent on making herself perfectly at home there.

Unlike the popular child of fiction, she had neither trinket nor mark which gave promise of future solution to the riddle of her appearance. She spoke very little, and her words gave no clue to any previous guardian or protector. She quickly suited herself to her new surroundings, and showed a marvellous adaptability to civilised uses. Her allegiance to Master Wilberforce never swerved. She could not bear him out of her sight. Morning, noon, and night she trotted after him like a little dog, and watched and waited on him with untiring devotion. Boy-like, he accepted it all with a patronising condescension. She seemed to him after a time only another specimen of household pet—a trifle more intelligent, perhaps, than his white mice or his squirrel, but holding no higher rank in his affections.

Gradually she slipped into a place in the household by right of his protection and favour, and time was left to elucidate the mystery of her origin. She was such a small, wild, pretty thing, scarcely of more consequence than a kitten, and with all a kitten's grace and mischief.

The Professor hardly noticed her. His wife delighted in her beauty and growing intelligence, and to Master Wilberforce himself she became a

subject for experiments, and a small but faithful slave to whom his will was law. She frequently accompanied Dick and himself on their rambles, much to the disgust of the older boy. They had begun by leaving her at home, but she had managed to track them in some mysterious manner, and thus discovered their cave. After that secrecy was useless. Master Wilberforce bound her down by a solemn promise not to betray this mystery to any of the household of Bloomville, and this promise she kept on condition of being allowed to accompany him on his excursions.

By the time she had been two months in the Professor's house, she was quite at home with everyone and everything.

It then occurred to Master Wilberforce that, having a sort of "right of discovery" in the waif, he might as well try to give her some sort of education. He reviewed the method by which he had reached his own present standpoint of knowledge, and familiar with both advantages and defects, he commenced a system of instruction destined to form a short cut, as well as a sure one, to the heights of Parnassus.

Thus it was that the Professor became aware of the results of a system upon which he had prided himself considerably.

He was in his study one hot August morning

engrossed in the perusal of a modern work on chemistry, when through the open window he caught a persistent hum-hum-hum of youthful voices. The book was not particularly interesting, and had a tendency to dispute old-established authorities. He closed it with the tolerant deference to new opinions that old heads often bestow on young ones, and leant back in his great leather chair for a brief spell of meditation. The faint "booming" of the voices in the garden were thus brought again under his notice.

He recognised his son's imperative tones, and roused himself to an attitude of attention.

"Now, Mehatabel, do give your mind to it. It's just as easy to learn two letters at a time as one, and gets you on to reading ever so much quicker."

"What's the good of reading?" demanded the young scholar. "It doesn't tell you anything you want to know: why we came here, and why the sky is blue, and what makes the leaves grow on the trees, and how the birds' eggs turn into feathers, and—oh! heaps and heaps of things like that."

"Yes, it does," asserted her teacher. "Books tell everything. Only clever people wrote them, and they had learnt from still cleverer people and put it down in print, so that we should get to be as wise as they were."

"How did they know the things they wrote was true?" inquired the student.

"Haven't I told you they *learnt* it? They had to learn. Every one has to learn. Why, it's just lovely! When you can read you get to know all that you ever want to."

"It would take a long time, wouldn't it?"

"Yes—s, I suppose so," answered Master Wilberforce doubtfully. "Because even my father says he doesn't know half enough, and he's been reading all his life."

"Books," continued the female voice, "look horrid. I don't like them. I like the woods and the fields, and to hear the birds sing, and see the little furry rabbits scuttle along, and to race the dogs, and watch the fish in the pools. Who made them all?" she continued abruptly.

"Why, God, I suppose. Same as you say your prayers to."

"How do you know He's God? Did anyone ever see Him?"

Master Wilberforce was obliged to confess that, so far as his scriptural knowledge went, no human being had ever been so favoured.

"Then I don't believe in Him. When you see anything, why, you know it's there—like the sky, and the trees, and the birds, and things, and you and I, and people. If God was in the sky, He'd

have been sure to show Himself to somebody—like the sun does, or the stars. Why," with a triumphant ring in the clear treble of her pretty voice, "He'd have been bound to show Himself just to see what the world was like, and how folk were getting on."

"How do you think of such things? Didn't any one ever teach you, or take care of you, really? You always say 'no,' but some one must have done things for you, or you'd have died."

"Died," repeated the child dreamily; "that's what they said of Muttie. She died; I went to look for her; they were all asleep. Then I got lost."

"Muttie," echoed Master Wilberforce. "Was she your mother? You never spoke of her before."

"I didn't want to be founded," said the child seriously. "They beat me, and they never gave me enough to eat. They were going across the sea—a terrible far way. I'm glad I got lost. I'll live with you always, won't I?"

"Of course you shall. I've no brother or sister, and I like you. I didn't think I'd ever like a girl, but you're half a boy, I think, and you never cry, and you're not frightened. But you must learn to read and write, you know."

"You can't tell me why the eggs grow into

feathers, or why you kneel down and say prayers to what you call 'God,' when no one has ever seen Him, or why I'm I, and you're you, and if He's good and kind, why He made so many cruel, wicked people?"

"No, but I'll be able to tell you some day, when I've read and learnt a lot."

"But I want to know *now*," was the imperative rejoinder. "Now—at once, this moment."

"Then," said Master Wilberforce resignedly, "there's nothing for it but to go and ask my father."

The Professor rose abruptly from his chair, and crossed over to the door and locked it. His face looked absolutely bewildered. He ran his thin, blue-veined hands through his scanty grey locks, and paced the room in much perturbation of spirit.

"Bless my soul—bless my soul! What an extraordinary child—what extraordinary children! I hope they won't come to me for such information. Dear, dear! I thought they only chased butterflies and robbed birds'-nests at that age. I'm sure I did. Feathers out of eggs! Good Heavens! And the riddle of the universe to be solved by explanation! I must really take matters in hand; but the girl's worse than the boy."

A sound of whispering voices came from without.

"When the door's locked," announced one, "it's a sign he's at experiments, and on no account must be disturbed."

The handle was tried—nervously by one hand, fiercely by the other.

"How soon the sex asserts itself!" murmured the Professor.

But he did not open the door.

CHAPTER V.

THE ETERNAL QUESTION.

WHATEVER experiments the Professor was at work upon, they had little benefit that day from his attention.

He was a quiet and intensely studious person, little acquainted with the world at large, and living largely in his own sphere of thought. To him, his son was still a child in the nursery—a young animal requiring a certain amount of food, sleep, and clothing, his mind limited to the capacity of Mavor's spelling-books, or "Little Arthur's History." That such a child should be capable of questioning facts in nature, or prying into the mysteries of "being," was a startling discovery.

All children imbibed a certain amount of secular and sacred knowledge from their mothers. It might not be practically correct, but it was useful, and to be classed among such beneficial trifles as cold baths, and simple diet, and early rising. The age at which the said child was to rise superior to such teaching, and ascend its own intellectual pedestal,

he had not yet determined. It seemed to him, however, that a certain amount of Greek and Latin philosophy would have to stand as starting-point to the race for higher knowledge.

What did his boy actually know? He had heard of his reading, of his knowledge of the globes, of his mastery of syntax and long division. All these, however, represented babyhood to a mind so far in advance of them. He left the boy to his mother, and to his own inclinations. Mrs. Wilberforce was not a brilliant or very cultured woman. Of science she was as ignorant as most women to whom the component parts of a subject are comparatively insignificant, and the quality of "air" only a question of an agreeable temperature.

But the Professor felt suddenly awake. Paternal responsibility forced itself upon his attention, and he resolved to interview his son and judge for himself of his mental condition.

For this purpose he sent a message to the boy that he was to come to him in an hour's time in his study—alone.

"Be sure and say 'alone,'" he repeated to the servant.

He had no desire to have that extraordinary young querist present at the interview.

Punctually to the moment Master Wilberforce presented himself at the study door. He had

found it impossible to escape the vigilance of the waif, and entered the room with her behind him, clinging to his waist-belt with one small hand.

"You'll have to go," he kept assuring her, but she was undeterred, and the Professor, after a mild suggestion that she should seek the garden, suffered her to remain.

The two children were a great contrast to each other: the boy slight, sallow, tall for his age, and decidedly ugly; the girl small, lithe, richly coloured as a tropical flower, the embodiment of restless, passionate life. She kept behind her companion, being somewhat in awe still of gold spectacles balanced judicially on a large Roman nose.

The Professor was seated in his usual chair. He leant back, folded his arms, and surveyed his son with mild curiosity.

"He looks at me as if I were a new kind of beetle or butterfly," thought Master Wilberforce, a little tired of the long scrutiny and the equally long silence.

The Professor at last cleared his throat, relaxed his attitude, and asked, as abruptly as a Sunday School catechist: "How old are you?"

"Eight next month," answered the boy, wondering a little that his father should not be equally well acquainted with the fact.

"Eight—eight. Dear me, how time flies.

Eight; and it seems only the other day when they called me to see you in the nurse's arms. Eight? Well, well, it is old enough. What do you say to beginning Virgil, eh?"

Master Wilberforce marvelled whether this feat was to be accomplished without the aid of the Latin Grammar. His friend Dick had assured him that the said grammar was "beastly rot," and he had taken his word for it. Still, to tackle Virgil was decidedly a leap in the dark.

"I should like it awfully," he said at last. "But I—I've not learnt any Latin yet. Mustn't one know declensions, and things?"

The Professor ruffled up his thin hair till he looked like an angry cockatoo.

"Of course," he said, "of course. I'll get a tutor for you."

"What's that?" demanded a small clear voice, curiosity vanquishing fear at last.

"Be quiet, Mehatabel," said the boy. "It doesn't concern you."

He was gratified at the information. It promised to throw open the gates of a wider field of knowledge, and already his desire to learn was as a burning, insatiable thirst. The great vast world, full of treasures of men's minds—a storehouse of wealth—it would be free to him at last. He would have a guide too; some one wise, clever,

steeped in lore and learning. The prospect was blissful.

"A tutor—yes. You are old enough," persisted the Professor. "It is time we began study—real study."

"He knows most everything," put in the child. "He's always reading books. Will the tutor tell him more than the books?"

She came forward in her eagerness, her great dark eyes all aglow, her crimson lips parted, the ripe rose colour ablaze in her cheeks.

The old man looked at her. She seemed indeed the incarnation of life in its youngest, richest, loveliest stage. He thought regretfully how pale and sickly his own child looked beside this wild blossom of nature.

"Books," he said dreamily, "are the best teachers. But youth wants a guiding hand for its first steps. The—the tutor I have in my mind will be better than books—for a time."

"Is he old—like you?" asked Mehatabel, unabashed.

"No; not so old. Not quite so old," answered the Professor, with a vague smile.

"Can he teach me too? Do let him. I'll be so good. I'll learn anything, only let me be with Horry."

"But you don't know your letters. You don't

know anything," exclaimed Master Wilberforce contemptuously. "Besides, men don't teach girls."

Her eyes blazed. She clenched her small brown hands.

"We'll see," she said. "I'll plague him till he does."

The Professor looked perplexed. Master Wilberforce laughed.

"She's a regular spitfire," he said. "But she's very interesting. You see, I never cared much about toys—even clockwork ones. She's better than clockwork."

The child's eyes were following the flight of a bird through the blue.

"How quick it flies!" she murmured. "It must be nice up there."

Suggestion did its work then, and drew her attention to a higher authority.

"Please," she said, "can you tell me why the eggs turn into feathers—little balls of feathers, you know, that live? And who is God, who, they say, is up in the sky?"

Professor Wilberforce was a wise man, a clever man; a man highly esteemed of his fellows; a man to whom the lore of science had long ceased to be abstruse. Yet he searched in vain for an answer to a child's simple question. He looked into her eyes, deep as a well, glowing ardent, imperious.

He looked at the shelves around his room, laden with volumes of wide and varied philosophy. Then his gaze went to his own child. The thoughtful, questioning, unchildlike face struck on him sharply as a yet unknown discovery. He felt old and chilled, and the shadow of Time seemed to stoop and touch him.

Wondering at so long a silence, the boy spoke.

"She's always bothering about those things," he said apologetically. "I can't say I've ever thought of them. Mother taught me my prayers, and I say them to her every night. It seemed as if God was up there. It's heaven, isn't it?"

"Heaven? the stellar region—the world of space. Yes, yes, of course; up there. Certainly, my boy; but you're too young to understand the —the real meaning of the word. Heaven represents to the ordinary mind a place peopled by angelic hosts, and filled with—" He paused abruptly. "Your mother," he said hastily, "is your best teacher still. Ask her, my dears. Ask her."

"I thought you knew everything," complained Mehatabel. "Horry said you did, and that you'd tell me—and oh, I did so want to know why the eggs turn into—"

The Professor jumped up from the chair with startling abruptness.

"You must run away now," he said. "I—I'm busy. I can't talk any more. There, go and play —go and play. It's the best thing for children."

He pushed them gently out of the room, and then went over to the window and heaved a sigh of relief.

"And he never told us after all," complained Mehatabel. "And you promised he would. I don't believe he knows."

"I don't believe anyone knows," said the boy, with the gravity of a centenarian. "They just hear things from other people, and say them again. My mother heard of God from her mother, and right away back like that, and I suppose it seems right. We'll know some day."

It is the only answer the wisest, and most persuaded, and most trustful of us can make. Ask what we will, whom we will, where we will, nature, man, or Heaven has naught more definite to tell us of the Eternal Mystery than a child's lips had uttered: "We shall know some day."

CHAPTER VI.

A VISIT.

"EDUCATION!" murmured Mrs. Wilberforce blankly. "But, my dear Horatius, I thought the boy was to—"

"Tut, tut, tut!" interrupted the Professor. "That did all very well for a time. The system was a test of primitive ability. It has had its use. The boy has brains. A certain course of training must now be undergone. He will require supervision—judicious, of course, and not arbitrary. The subject is essentially a claimant for freedom. A certain amount of intelligent liberty must be allowed. Good seed takes time to ripen. The time has come for sowing it. A sound classical education will be of immense advantage. I must set about procuring the requisite means for imparting it."

"He is so young," pleaded the mother, to whom the very sight of Greek and Latin volumes were *anathema maranatha.* A vision of her darling's dark cropped head enveloped in wet towels, of

golden hours wasted in sharp tussels with mathematical problems of whose use she was utterly sceptical, rose before her. These were the fiends that tore boys from their mother's arms, and made their days a burden and their rest a nightmare; these were the foes of home influence and womanly tenderness. Her boy would become as other boys. The rough, boisterous life of school had hitherto been evaded. She saw her doom, and wept.

"I can't part from him, Horatius," rang her plaint. "He is my only one; you—you can't understand what a mother feels!"

The Professor took off his glasses, and gazed at his spouse in mild wonder.

"Part with him?" he echoed. "I never said you were to part with him. Education can be carried on at home. I don't place much value on schools myself. They destroy individuality; boys are turned into machines. The whole life is mechanical: so many hours for work, play, food, rest; the laggard and the genius alike harnessed into class routine; the bully and the sneak preying on physical weakness and terrorising timid natures. I remember my own days—"

He sighed. He looked at his wrinkled hands, and his wife's grey hair banded smoothly either side her placid face.

"Yes," he went on presently, "it is long ago;

but I remember my own days. They were not pleasant. Indeed, I may say they were hateful. Doubtless they had beneficial results, but I should not care for my son to share the same experience. No, you shall not be parted yet awhile—not till he goes to college, I hope. He shall have a tutor."

Mrs. Wilberforce breathed freely once more. She marvelled in her own heart why the theory of "self-bringing-up" had fallen through. Still, it had stood the test of five years, and as far as general knowledge went, Master Wilberforce was in every way a credit to the system.

"When does he begin?" she asked presently. She knew her husband's absent-mindedness. He might, and probably would, forget all about the tutor as soon as the matter was decided.

"Begin? Oh, I've written to the young man to-day."

"Who is he?" asked Mrs. Wilberforce, mildly surprised at such promptitude.

"He is the son of an old college friend—dead now, poor man! He adopted the medical profession, the widow writes to me. She was left badly off. This is their only son—let me see, where's the letter? That will tell you everything."

He fumbled in his pockets, and at last produced a letter, which he handed to his wife. She read it quietly, and replaced it in its envelope.

"I've been thinking," she said, "that it would be pleasant for Horace to have a companion to study with him. You know he is very friendly with the grandson of our neighbour, Sir Richard Jarvis. Why not arrange for the two boys to study together?"

The Professor reflected.

"Emulation," he said, "is often an incentive to youth. Your suggestion is not unwise. However, our neighbour is not a very—very pleasant sort of person. He might object to the proposal."

"I am going to call on Miss Jarvis," observed Mrs. Wilberforce, "and I might sound her on the subject. The two boys are great friends. I believe they are constantly together."

"Friendship—association," answered the Professor. "Ah, it is strange how human nature clings to the old law of sociability; how abhorrent loneliness is to youth. The interchange of thought and ideas seems imperative. Well, well, see about the matter, my dear; I have no objection. The young man who will take charge of Horace will, I am sure, be a wise guide. I trust he resembles his father. His mother says so."

He looked kindly at the sweet, placid face beside him.

"I believe in mothers," he said abruptly.

She glanced up quickly. Their hands met.

"My dear husband," she murmured, and thought proudly she would not change places with any living woman the world held.

The simple-minded have their own road to happiness, a road that the wise of the earth have been known to envy in some unguarded moment of natural affection.

The discussion upon the tutor and his actual advent were events not very far apart. Sandwiched between them came a memorable interview

between Mrs. Wilberforce and Great-aunt Grizel, described partly by herself and partly by Dick, as an involuntary eavesdropper.

He had been sitting in the wide window-seat of the shabby old drawing-room, and was concealed by heavy damask curtains from any part of the room. Engrossed in an old edition of "Midshipman Easy," he was roused only by the sound of voices, and awoke to the fact that his aunt was receiving a visitor. His first thought was to escape through the window. It was an easy jump; but unfortunately the window was closed, and he dared not risk the noise of opening it. He was strictly forbidden to enter this sacred apartment at all. He therefore kept quiet, and gave his attention to the conversation.

Grand-aunt Grizel was an austere virgin of uncertain age. She was stiff and cold in demeanour, wore a hard black front, severe caps, and rustling brocades of skimpy and decidedly antiquated fashion. She somewhat despised Mrs. Wilberforce as a person of weak mind and foolish pride in an act of maternity that, performed so late in life, almost savoured of impropriety. For her own part she evinced a virulent animosity towards the opposite sex—the juvenile members of it in particular. Her position towards her nephew was one of incessant hostility. Mrs. Wilberforce's

praises of her own boy, and perpetual recapitulation of his virtues, always annoyed her on this account, and the visits of that lady were never very cordially received. Mrs. Wilberforce, good soul, was dense almost to stupidity on the matter of shades and degrees of cordiality. She performed the duties of "calling" on her neighbours as punctiliously as she interviewed her cook and superintended her household. The subtle distinctions of country society did not trouble her. The poison of scandal, the fœtid breath of gossip, swept harmlessly over her grey head, and disturbed not her serene soul. "Speaking no ill" was decidedly her form of charity, and if she had few intimate friends, she had at least no enemies.

Miss Jarvis greeted her in her usual formal manner, opined that the weather was seasonable, the harvest prospects all that one could reasonably expect, and then sat stiff and erect awaiting her visitor's responses.

Mrs. Wilberforce, being no diplomatist, went straight to the point by asking the state of her grand-nephew's health, and how he employed his time during his holidays.

"His time," echoed the austere virgin, "is, I regret to say, invariably wasted. Boys are, I am sure, a mistake of nature. Cruelty and disobedience seem their sole idea of enjoyment. The

Scripture truly says that the 'little foxes spoil the vines.' I thank Heaven that I, at least, have escaped the perils of the vineyard."

Indeed, there was little of the vine, fruitful or otherwise, about Grand-aunt Grizel. Her uncompromising severity of aspect made even a thought of sexual exigencies incongruous.

"You mustn't be hard on him," put in the voice of the peacemaker. "Boys will be boys. It's not their fault, I suppose. It's what they were intended for."

Mrs. Wilberforce did not appear to have imbibed much of her husband's philosophy. Her ideas sounded remarkably crude even to the by no means up-to-date ears of the elderly virgin.

"Ay," she said grimly, "the Ethiopian cannot change his skin."

"I was about to say—to suggest—I mean," faltered Mrs. Wilberforce, abashed by the stern eye fixed on her face, "I was going to tell you that we are about to have a private tutor for our son—the grammar school at N—— is so very inferior, the Professor thinks. And it struck us both that as the boys are such friends, Sir Richard would not object to Dick joining in Horace's studies. The one would, so to say, spur on the other. A little emulation is a great help to study, and Horace is most anxious for a fellow-student."

"I have nothing to do with Richard," answered his grand-aunt severely. "He rebelled against my authority long since, and I have ceased to trouble my head about him. But I will mention the matter to his grandfather. He is seriously dissatisfied with Richard's progress—or rather want of progress. The boy simply learns nothing except bad language and vulgar habits. I am surprised sometimes that you permit your son to associate with him."

Mrs. Wilberforce looked slightly alarmed. She really knew very little of Dick's nature or habits. His visits were not of a formal description, and the sight of his friend's parents either drove him to instant flight, or affected him with sudden dumbness.

"Oh, I hope he is not as bad as you think," she faltered timidly. "He seemed such a fine, manly-looking boy, I've always thought. I often wish my Horace had half his strength and spirits."

"The children of parents advanced in years," put in the austere virgin, "are seldom blessed with good constitutions. The last time I saw Horace I thought he looked decidedly—pasty. I should give him iron and camomile if I were you."

Dick nearly betrayed his presence here by a guffaw. The idea of poor little Horry being pre-

scribed for by Grand-aunt Grizel seemed to him exquisitely humorous.

Mrs. Wilberforce rose abruptly. Her feathers were decidedly ruffled. A slight flush burned in her smooth, unwrinkled cheek. "Pasty!" her darling to be called "pasty" by a soured, ignorant old maid, who could not possibly understand the

simplest ailments of children. It was more than flesh and blood could stand.

"My son has excellent health, thank you," she said stiffly. "He is naturally pale, I allow; but pallor is not a sign of delicacy. He has never had a day's illness since he left the nursery."

Miss Jarvis sniffed contemptuously, as if the announcement were purely insignificant.

"Good-bye," she said, extending a mittened hand. "I will mention your suggestion to my brother. If he approves, he will doubtless call on Professor Wilberforce to arrange the matter."

They shook hands with the cordiality of two icebergs, and Dick, in ecstasy of delight at his discovery, waited till the coast was clear, and then betook himself to the adjoining territory to confide it to his youthful friend.

CHAPTER VII

THE INTERROGATIVE PERIOD.

"I'd like it awfully, you know," confessed Dick, as the two boys sauntered to and fro in the grounds of Broomville that evening, "but that old brute of a grandfather is sure to say no. He never does let me have anything I want, or do anything I like. You're jolly lucky to have such a guv'nor; they don't grow on every tree, I can tell you."

Dick's language was always vigorous, mostly slangy; slang was the favoured vernacular of the grammar school.

"You know Latin, don't you?" asked Master Wilberforce.

"Oh, I've learnt some grammar—beastly rot, you know. And there's a fellow called Balbus—did you ever hear such a rotten name?—who's always interfering with another chap called Caius, and they make up exercises about them; enough to make a chap sick, you know. I don't see the good of learning such stuff. I'd like to go to sea, that's what I'd like. There's a jolly life for you! A free

gale and a flowing sheet, and climbing masts! I'd be a rare hand at that, Horry—spiffin' I call it. But they won't let me go into the Navy, and I've to keep on grinding at books till I hate the sight of them. It's all very well for you now, but you just wait a bit till you've got to grind; you'll change your tune then, I bet."

Master Wilberforce looked thoughtful. He could not understand learning being anything but a pleasure. He was clearly not of the common type of boy; the noisy, harum-scarum, door-slamming boy, the sliding-down-banister boy with a love of whistling and practical jokes. But Dick Jarvis was, and if he could have had his way, he would have been a most conscientious instructor in these arts. He welcomed the idea of the tutor solely as an escape from the loathsome routine and manifold incarcerations of the grammar school.

He had hopes of making Horace less of a milk-sop, and initiating him into such dodges and derelictions from duty as make the life of a tutor a burden, and his desires to fail.

He grew enthusiastic over the theme, and rattled on quite unconscious of his young friend's absent looks and replies. Master Wilberforce, in truth, felt rather bored. He did not appreciate this sort of fun, and failed to detect the exquisite humour of a booby-trap, or the delicate wit of using pins

as a natural lever to the human frame when it is disposed to seat itself. These things might be funny—Dick seemed to think so—but to his mind they seemed rather idiotic.

"Hang it all, don't look so solemn," said Dick at last. "What a chap you are for thinking! What can it matter about the stars, or the shape of the world? All I know is, I've got to live in the one, and I can look at the other; and the best thing to do is to enjoy yourself, and not worry over the meaning of things."

"I suppose I can't help it," said Master Wilberforce. "We're all different, somehow, you know."

"Well, you're jolly different to all the chaps I've ever known," said Dick candidly. "Sometimes I think you were born old. You're not half a boy. Now, that little wild kid you picked up—what's this she calls herself?—Mehatabel—well, she's got twice the grit and spirit you have. A regular little dare-devil, ain't she? I wonder she's not hanging round you to-night as usual."

"She said she was going to stay with nurse, for a wonder. I expect she's up to some mischief. Whenever she's quiet, it's a bad sign."

"Do your people really mean to keep her—always?" asked Dick curiously. "She's only a gipsy child, I believe. My grandfather says he'd

have sent her to the workhouse if she had come to him."

"Your grandfather is very cruel, then," answered Horace. "Poor little soul, how could she help being lost, or deserted? Father thinks she was just left there on purpose."

"I expect she was. She looks half wild still; but I suppose she'll be a rare beauty some day. Grandfather has a picture in the library by some old Italian chap — I can't remember his name. It's a girl—the picture, I mean—just like Mehatabel—same sort eyes, and colour, and mouth. I expect your people will find her a rare handful some day."

"Oh, I'll look after her," said Horace magnanimously. "She's only a girl. They're very helpless, aren't they? And they can't do much harm."

There was no one to deny the assertion, or to laugh at it. So the two wise philosophers parted in serene content with such belief, as the supper-bell rang out its warning note.

Perhaps because no one expected he would give in to the Professor's proposal—probably because no one believed it—Sir Richard Jarvis accepted the offer with every expression of approval. His grandson's education was in a deplorable condition of backwardness, he declared. Doubtless it was

his own fault; but the grammar school came in also for a good share of abuse. The prospect of his receiving a fair share of undivided attention was a prospect that also promised better results. He expected little from the incorrigible Dick, his idleness and stupidity were too well known; but he should have this chance, at all events, before being packed off to a boarding-school.

So it was settled, and the day was fixed, and the tutor arrived.

He was a young man; to all appearance, about five-and-twenty. As for his looks, the boys did not criticise them further than by a joint expression of admiration at his moustache, and the remark that he seemed "a strong, wiry chap."

The study, where they had their lessons, was given to him as a private sitting-room when he wished to be alone; but in a very few days he was perfectly at home, and had, so to speak, the run of the house.

He took Master Wilberforce in hand with some doubt. The boy looked so young, and yet his ideas of what he intended to learn were so very pronounced.

David Lawrence had been at a public school, and passed thence to Oxford, where he had studied for the Church; but he was obliged to confess that he had never met, in the whole course

of his experience, a boy like this, or one so fond of delving to the root of all matters about which he desired information.

"So you were going to be a clergyman, Mr Lawrence," he said, on the third day of his arrival. "What made you want to be one? Did you feel different from the other students? Did you know you were better? A clergyman must be better, mustn't he? They say he has a special call. What's a special call? Of course you had one, too. Does God come and tell you that you're to be a clergyman?"

The young man coloured faintly. He had had no "special call." The generality of the divinity students were just as rackety and foolish, and as much given to "wine parties," and cards, and other similar amusements, as the ordinary university youth. He felt puzzled to answer this frank questioner.

"I—I—well, my father wished it, you see," he said at last, "and it was a profession, like law, or medicine, or science, and I just took it up. Doubtless the serious part of the matter would have impressed me later, when I had really taken orders."

Master Wilberforce shook his head disapprovingly.

"Oh, that doesn't seem right," he said. "One

always considers a clergyman so different to other people—specially set aside, you know—and as

they're always telling us how to be good, of course they must know the way themselves; and if they know it, why, there's no excuse for their not being

it. Aren't you going to be a clergyman now?" he added.

David Lawrence confessed that his father's death had altered many plans and projects, and that he had given up the bright prospects of a hundred pounds a year curacy to please his mother.

Master Wilberforce shook his head disapprovingly.

"You couldn't have had the call," he said, "or you would have felt that you couldn't give it up. I think you must be like the young man who put his hand to the plough and kept looking back. If I ever took up a thing I should go on with it; but then," he added reflectively, "I should feel quite sure that I wanted to take it up. Same as I knew I wanted to read, and I did read. I was allowed to bring myself up, you know."

"And how did you do it?" asked David Lawrence, gulping down something that was too nearly akin to laughter to be indulged in at such a critical moment.

Master Wilberforce related his method. It was simple, but its effectuality destroyed all mirthful proclivities on the part of the tutor.

"Have you ever taught boys before?" he asked in conclusion.

David Lawrence reluctantly allowed that that

blissful experience had not as yet been his portion.

"I suppose you've thought out a system of your own?" continued the youthful philosopher. "Boys differ awfully, you know. Now Dick isn't a bit like me. He only likes mischief and fun, and what he calls 'shirking' work. I could never see any good in shirking it. If it's got to be done, why, it's best to do it. Besides, I like doing it. I want to get on just as fast as ever I can, so as to be as clever as my father. We'll begin Latin to-morrow, won't we?"

"Certainly, if you wish."

"You can knock out those Balbus and Caius chaps if you like," continued Master Wilberforce. "It's a pity the exercises are so foolish. I've looked into Dick's books the last few days, so I can pretty well tell how we're to begin."

The "looking into" process proved that Master Wilberforce had rather under-estimated his knowledge. David Lawrence soon decided that a pupil of such abilities had better leap by one bound to verbs and construing.

Indeed, the boy's brain seemed to have an intuitive perception of subjects. They were grasped, thought out, and finally mastered, while the ordinary scholar would have been plodding at the very A B C of the matter. He soon found, too,

that Dick Jarvis was all that his candid friend had asserted—intelligent enough, but decidedly given to the "shirking" process. He displayed the greatest interest and docility; indeed, his efforts at comprehension and zeal at work were almost distressingly obvious. To use a horsey expression, Master Wilberforce took his mental exercise at an easy canter, Dick at a painful gallop. Yet at the end of every lesson the result was the same: the one was perfect in his subject, intelligently perfect, and the other never seemed to have the faintest idea of what he had been learning or hearing.

The tutor began to be a little bit uneasy respecting his brilliant pupil. There seemed something unnatural about an aptitude quite apart from the shallow triumphs of memory. An excellent thing in itself memory is often misleading. It scores brilliantly in the crowd, but it is only a superficial mastery of difficulties, not an intellectual one.

Master Wilberforce, however, displayed not only the memory but the mastery of every task he undertook, yet he never seemed to use any special effort or take any longer time over them than his active-bodied and slow-witted companion. It was impossible not to become interested in him. The tutor had a keen sense of humour, and the boy was an inexhaustible source of delight to him. The very nursery legends which Mrs. Wilberforce would

pour out in his ears on the slightest encouragement, were so many clues to the mystery of his organisation, and the peculiarly logical basis of his mind. It was never any use to tell Horace a thing *was*, without being fully prepared to state why it was.

This period of his existence might, indeed, be aptly described as the interrogative period.

Everything was questioned and inquired into. The hunger of "to know" was not to be appeased by the usual formulas which satisfy the mind of youth. As for books, there is no critic so severe as the unbiassed, eager, and innocently exacting questioner to whom facts stand as a religion, and who will argue firmly, if not logically, on every deviation from the original text, however well-intentioned.

Truly the fairies had had nothing to do with Master Wilberforce's birth or christening. Some hard-headed mathematical demon must have presided over those functions, and bestowed on the godchild of science the gift of perpetual inquiry.

CHAPTER VIII.

"ORIGINAL SIN."

A FLASH of scarlet, representing sash ribbons, and a chance glimpse of a dark, glowing face, had at times informed David Lawrence that there was another inmate of Broomville besides those with whom he was acquainted. But who was the owner of either the ribbons, or the face, he had not yet discovered.

Their appearance had been so rare that they had passed from his memory. He found, indeed, ample occupation in attending to the demands of Master Wilberforce, and in persuading him into the frivolities of sports and pastimes when lesson hours were over.

However, cricket possessed few charms, and rowing was beyond his strength as yet. He hated walking, except at night, when the presence of what astronomers term "the heavenly bodies" gave him a subject for incessant questions such as could only have come within the answerable capacity of the Astronomer Royal himself.

He no longer made secret excursions, having promised his mother that he would never again give her cause for alarm on that score. And he had never been known to break his word.

The responsibility of possessing a tutor, and the incessant desire to gain all conceivable advantage from such a possession, had completely rivalled the glories of the secret cave and the delicate delights of piracy and amateur smuggling. In vain Dick remonstrated, argued, bribed. Master Wilberforce, true to his system, maintained there was no sense or use in such pursuits, and turned a deaf ear to the voice of the charmer.

Dick grumbled, but had to content himself with his own company as a pirate, or else pass his nights where he was supposed to pass them—in the rational enjoyment of natural repose.

But no one suffered from the new order of things as did the waif Mehatabel. Only at rare moments could she secure Horace's company, and then he was absorbed and inattentive, and inclined to treat her as a mere baby.

The civilising influences of her new life had effected a considerable alteration in her appearance. Her skin was clear and mellow; her hair a glossy mass of natural curls—the loose lovely curls of childhood, rippling in their own rich waywardness about face and shoulders. The lithe grace of

her figure was still remarkable—the grace one sees in the young panther, the playful tiger cub—a grace at once seductive and dangerous, but indescribably fascinating. Even Master Wilberforce recognised something of its charm when he watched her spring lightly from bough to bough, or climb cat-like to the heights of the tallest trees, where even Dick feared to follow her.

Although she never swerved from her allegiance to her first friend, she found herself gradually attracted to Dick as a fellow-sufferer. Together they lamented the dereliction of their late comrade, and voted the tutor a nuisance, and Latin and Greek simply an invention of the Evil One.

It would have astonished Dick considerably had he known that every spare moment of Nurse Doldrum's time was engaged in bestowing instruction on the very child who abused it. Mehatabel had, in fact, never foregone her first intention of sharing Horace's studies as well as his tutor. She was sufficiently conscious, however, of natural deficiencies to work in secret at their correction before appearing on the scene. Meantime, she harboured an insane jealousy of the unconscious David Lawrence, and looked upon him as the foe of her young existence. He engrossed Master Wilberforce to the gradual exclusion of herself. He could interest him as she never could hope to

do. No wonder she made common cause with Dick, though she nursed her hatred so closely that he never suspected it.

The absolute idolatrous fondness of a child is not to be explained. Whether it manifests itself for a human or animal object, it is lavish to excess in the expenditure of feeling. A child, such as this lawless gipsy, untrained, uncared-for, up to a given moment, was naturally inclined not only to love passionately, but with a strong undercurrent of exaction. She suffered terribly at Master Wilberforce's gradual desertion, but she was far too proud and self-restrained to show it. Her tears were shed in secret, her wild tempests of passion spent on inanimate objects or wept out on the bosom of nature—her best and earliest friend after all.

It was on the occasion of one of these outbursts that she found herself some miles from home in a solitary wood, in whose depths lay a dark, still pool. The deep water, so calm and stirless, mirroring fleeting cloud or waving bough, had always possessed a strange fascination for her. She loved to bend over and gaze at her own reflection—the large burning eyes mocking her the wild tangle of curls falling confusedly about the glowing face, now catching a stray sunbeam, now shut out by the dark tangle of interlaced

boughs and climbing ivy. To-day, however, as she approached it, she caught the sound of voices, and hurriedly concealed herself in the thicket. Peering cautiously through, she discovered the speakers were two boys, evidently truants from the grammar school, judging by their expressions. The day appeared to have been one of delirious excitement, in which stolen "grub," snared rabbits, and the collecting of birds' eggs had played a prominent part.

This was all quite intelligible to the listener. A further interest, however, was added to the conversation by the production, from the pockets of one, of certain small metal articles, whose contemplation appeared to afford them exquisite enjoyment. Mehatabel vainly endeavoured to ascertain what they were. It appeared their rightful province was to make a gun "go off." Neither of the truants, however, had a gun, and numerous were their laments.

These laments gradually led to the retailing of the history of a certain "Tom Bray," who appeared to have been a youth of spirit and adventure, and whose life had been one signal career of misfortune from the early age of six.

This brilliant youth had finally put an end to himself and a paraffin lamp at one and the same moment, including in the process of destruction

such minor trifles as his mother's household goods, and part of the tenement she rented.

Before achieving this final triumph, however, it appeared that the said "Tom" had considerably disfigured his manly features by experimenting with the very identical articles his friends were now handling. It further appeared that a pin applied to these same articles would cause a perfectly "rippin'" explosion, and in the figurative language of youthful grammarians, send all the cats in the house to blazes! Mehatabel listened, and her savage young soul rejoiced. A burning desire to secure one or two of these delightful playthings possessed her, and her quick brain set to work at accomplishing that result. Screening herself still more closely in the thick tangle around, she lifted her voice and gave vent to a screech so eerie and blood-curdling that the two boys sprang to their feet in mortal terror, and the loosely handled cartridges fell on the ground, while they themselves took to their heels and fled.

The wood had an evil reputation. Someone had once been found drowned in that dark pool. They remembered this, and rushed madly on to less ominous regions, forgetful of the spoils they had left behind.

Mehatabel stepped quickly out of her hiding-place, and in another moment had grabbed

some half-dozen of the coveted articles. She thrust them into her pocket, her eyes gleaming, her whole face aglow with wild triumph. Then she took the opposite path, or rather track, to that the boys had followed, and reached Broomville as the dusk was closing in.

Stealing softly through the grounds, she came upon Horace and his tutor. They were talking earnestly, and the young man's arm rested lightly on the boy's shoulder as he paused to explain some newly questioned fact.

An expression of hate, terrible in so young a face — terrible, too, in its prophetic revenge — flashed stormily from her eyes. She shrank back until they had passed, turning then to shake a small clenched fist at the unconscious object of her hatred, and to hiss at him a word so foul and evil that the very air might have shuddered as it bore its echo through the stirless boughs.

CHAPTER IX.

THWARTED AMBITION.

DAVID LAWRENCE was alone in his study the next afternoon, glancing over the boys' Latin exercises. It was close upon the usual tea-hour, and he was devoting the intervening moments to the necessary corrections of the morning's work. The wide French window was open, and the mild October air swept softly through the room, laden with scents of late roses and mignonette from adjacent garden beds.

Suddenly he was roused by a quick patter of feet, and as he glanced up, a small figure took a flying leap into the room, and then stood before him, breathless and glowing, with bright dark eyes fastened on his astonished face. He laid down the books and surveyed the intruder with some amusement.

"Do you usually enter rooms like that?" he asked. "May I inquire if you wished to see—me?"

"Yes," was the abrupt answer. "I've got something to say. I don't want the boys to know."

"Rely upon my discretion," said the young man gravely. "I am all attention."

Her straight brows drew together in a quick, angry frown. A flash shot from the bright, dark eyes.

"You needn't laugh," she said, with suppressed fierceness. "I'm quite in earnest. I want you to teach me."

The tutor began to think that he had stumbled upon the most extraordinary house in England. The very atmosphere seemed to inspire studious ambitions in the mind of childhood. However, he had not bargained for a third pupil, nor one of the gentler sex, so he proceeded to debate the question.

"Teach you?" he said. "But you're only a little girl. Are you any relation to Horace?" he continued, remembering chance glimpses of the scarlet sash that bound her little waist in such picturesque folds.

"He found me," said the child. "I was lost. When Muttie was dead no one wanted me. They let me get lost. I didn't mind. But I belong to Horry now."

"Oh! and a very charming treasure-trove you are," laughed Lawrence. "Still, you're not ex-

actly up to his educational standard, I should fancy. In plain words, your present schoolroom ought to be the nursery."

Again that savage flash lit the mutinous face.

"I'm not a child," she said. "I'm nearly as old as

Horry, and I know letters and reading. I want to be with him. I know he's ever so much cleverer, but I can't bear him away all these long days. Let me sit here too, even if you don't teach me. I'll be quite quiet, I promise you."

Still he laughed and jested over what was such serious earnest to the savage, untutored mind of the child, guided and swayed purely by its own rebellious instincts. It amused him to see this pretty gipsy pleading so earnestly for such a very odd favour, but he was not the least disposed to grant it. He had certainly not come to Broomville to teach babies their alphabet, or impart the interesting facts conveyed through "easy reading lessons," that Miss Jane Bond had received a new doll, and likewise possessed an aunt who was generously disposed in the matter of its wardrobe.

"My dear little girl," he said at last, "what you ask is quite impossible. Three or four years hence you might be advanced enough for me to undertake your education—in English—but at present I must decline the honour on Horace's behalf as well as my own. You would only be a disturbing influence in the schoolroom. I cannot really admit you. Dolls and picture-books are more in your line at present, I feel sure."

The child could not half understand his words, but she was keen to recognise their import. They breathed "no" to her eager desires; they raised a new barrier between her and the idol of her young heart; they woke again the slumbering demon of jealous hate, and fired her still half-savage brain to revengeful issues.

He leaned back in his chair watching her with eyes of lazy amusement. She was so lovely—such a picture of natural rebellion at restraining influences of civilisation.

"I wonder what's her history," he thought. "No cool English blood runs through those veins."

Suddenly the tornado of rage burst forth. He saw the small brown hands clench on the chair by which she stood; he saw the rich colour fly to her cheeks, which had paled for a moment in eagerness of supplication; he saw the great glowing eyes flash out in impotent childish rage. Then such a torrent of invective broke from her lips as fairly startled him.

"I *hate* you," she cried. "I should like to kill you. Everything's different since you came. You've taken Horry away; you never let him see me; you won't let me learn with him. I'd like to kill you! I wish I could kill you!"

He rose then and stood confronting the small fury. There was no smile on his lips now.

"Come, come," he said, "you must not talk like that. It's wicked, and foolish too. If these people have been kind enough to give you a home, you must try and behave like—like other little girls, you know. What would Mrs. Wilberforce say if she heard you talking like this—or Horace either?"

That name seemed to act on her like a spell. Her hands relaxed, her eyes drooped, the mutinous red mouth closed on a rush of words that would have horrified David Lawrence's refined ears.

Swiftly as she had come she turned and fled, leaving him gazing in comic bewilderment at the open window, and the last flutter of a scarlet ribbon.

"Well, I seem to have dropped into a perfect hornets' nest of extraordinary children," he exclaimed, as he put the exercise books aside. "What an awful little spitfire; but what a beauty she'll be some day!"

Meanwhile the spitfire was roaming the garden far and wide, reckless of the summons of the tea-bell, the anxieties of the patient Doldrum, or the cravings of a naturally healthy appetite.

"I do hate him—I'm glad I told him!" she panted wildly. "And I've given him his chance. If he had said 'Yes' it would have been all right. Now—oh! I hope it will go off. I hope it will hurt him. I said I'd like to kill him, and I meant it. I'd do it this moment if I could!"

Steps and voices arrested her progress. She heard Nurse Doldrum's shrill note pealing forth her name.

She turned reluctantly in that direction, receiving the usual scolding with a meekness born of

complete indifference. Long repression and intimidation had lent her a certain passivity that stood in place of obedience. Creatures governed as she had been governed are like volcanoes—alternately flaming and smouldering.

With bent head and lowered eyelids she took her place at the tea-table, where Master Wilberforce was already seated, a book propped up against the milk-jug, a slice of home-made cake in his hand.

He took no notice of the child's entrance. The book was Cæsar's "Commentaries."

She looked at him from time to time as she ate the thick bread and butter prepared for her. The children usually had their tea alone under Nurse Doldrum's supervision. For once she made no effort to break the silence, or indulged in her usual invectives against this new habit of reading at tea-time. Silently she ate, silently she watched, her small brain busy with evil machinations, her mind absorbed by an engrossing, passionate desire for vengeance on the destroyer of her peace. She could not wait; she felt as if every moment was wasted that withheld from David Lawrence his just punishment. Bit by bit she thought out her scheme, planning and plotting with a subtlety almost marvellous in one so young. But her life

had been the life that sharpens the faculties, and dulls the finer instincts of right and wrong.

To hate and to revenge were one and the same thing with her. Her threat had been no idle word-play, but the instinctive utterance of a purpose wonderful in its savage relentlessness.

Again and again her hand wandered to the pocket of her frock; again and again her eyes rested on the unconscious instrument she had selected to carry out her purpose. Every moment brought its possible fulfilment nearer.

The dusk closed in. Master Wilberforce laid aside his book, and then awoke apparently to the fact of his companion's presence.

"Done your tea, Mehatabel?" he asked. "Why, it's nearly dark. I wonder if Mr. Lawrence is ready to go out for a walk?"

She sidled cautiously up to him.

"Horry," she whispered, "I want you to do something for me, but you must promise to do it exactly as I tell you. Say—yes. You're always so cruel and unkind to me now."

"Cruel!" The boy looked at her in astonishment. "Nonsense! What on earth have I done? You're such a queer little mortal—always fancying things."

He patted her head with grave condescension.

She was little more to him than one of his tame pets.

She nestled still closer. He saw that she held something in her hand.

"What is it you want?" he asked.

"Well, it's just this." She opened her hand and displayed a small, dull, metal object. Master Wilberforce had never seen anything like it.

"Look here," she went on, "this is a most wonderful thing—oh, you can't think how wonderful! It—it plays music, only the spring's wrong now. I want you just to take it to Mr. Lawrence when you go." She glanced out at the deepening dusk that would so well suit her purpose, then hurried on. "Ask him," she said slowly, "to put a pin in—here—do you see where I mean? Promise you won't touch it yourself. Mr. Lawrence will

understand; he's so clever. Then it'll be all right, and I'll—I'll give it to you."

Master Wilberforce looked at her wonderingly.

"You needn't be so mysterious about it," he said. "And why do you want Mr. Lawrence to do it? If it's so simple, any one else would do as well."

Her hand closed over it again.

"No," she said, "he must do it. If you won't take it, I'll go myself and ask him."

In her childish ignorance she forgot that David Lawrence might at once recognise the object and its natural use, and that the last thing he would be likely to do would be to treat so dangerous an article as she directed.

The boy, however, felt curious as to what the thing really was. He took it again from her hand. At the same moment his eyes fell on a long needle lying close to a piece of work on the adjoining table.

He moved towards it, and the child, fancying he was going to the study, drew away, and for a moment relaxed her attention. At the same time Nurse Doldrum entered to remove the tea-things, and as a preliminary proceeding, commenced a lecture to Mehatabel on the sin of unpunctuality.

The child's lips opened in saucy response, but the words were abruptly silenced by an explosion, followed by a piercing scream and a heavy fall.

Master Wilberforce lay prostrate on the floor, his hands beating against the boards in frenzied agony.

In an instant the nurse was by his side and had raised him in her arms, imploring to know what was the matter. But the wild hands only beat the air, or pressed themselves in frantic terror against his eyes.

"Oh, dear God! I'm blind--I'm blind—I'm blind!"

That was all he moaned again and again.

"Oh, nurse, my eyes—they're gone! I can't see. I'll never see again!"

CHAPTER X.

DESPERATION.

UTTERLY bewildered, but with an idea of seeking useful aid, the old woman lifted the boy in her trembling arms and rushed to the Professor's study.

Scarce waiting for admission, she bore her moaning burden into the room, and hurriedly announced the catastrophe. The Professor snatched the boy from her arms, and gave one look at the poor blistered eyes.

"Where did he get gunpowder?" he asked. Then recognising the uselessness of the query, he laid him gently down on the couch, and going to a small cabinet, took out a bottle, and pouring some of its contents on his handkerchief, laid them on the boy's eyes. The piteous moaning ceased under the grateful relief, and the Professor turned sharply to the trembling woman.

"Send for a doctor," he said, "at once. Let Rogers take the carriage, and wait and bring him

back. Say it is urgent. And, stay—where is your mistress?"

The nurse thought she was in the drawing-room, and as yet happily unconscious of the accident.

"Don't tell her; keep it from her if you can," was his hurried mandate.

Then the door was closed and locked.

"Now lie there, my boy. Don't move; try to bear it a little while," urged the Professor soothingly. "I know the pain is bad; but it will soon get better. Tell me whenever the bandage gets hot."

The boy's face was white and drawn with agony; but even at that moment he thought less of the suffering than of the consequences of the accident.

"Shall I be blind, father?" he cried piteously. "Oh, I don't mind the pain—I don't mind anything—only tell me I sha'n't be blind."

"It's impossible to tell you till the doctor sees how far you have injured your eyes," answered the Professor, trying to speak calmly. "How could you have done such a foolish thing? What were you doing with gunpowder?"

"It wasn't gunpowder," he said, "it was a little metal thing that Mehatabel gave me. She said it played music. I was just touching it with a needle

when it exploded, and my eyes seemed to go right out of my head, and it was all dark ; and oh—the awful, awful pain."

His voice faltered. He was very young, and this was his first experience of acute suffering.

The Professor felt puzzled. He could not determine exactly what sort of explosive had inflicted all this damage, or how Mehatabel could possibly have got hold of such a dangerous plaything.

When the nurse returned to say the doctor had been sent for, he despatched her to find the author of this catastrophe, and also to request Mr. Lawrence to come to him.

David Lawrence obeyed the summons immediately.

In a few words the Professor explained the accident. The young man's face grew grave and concerned.

" I wonder," he said, " if I could be of any use ? A young fellow at college met with a very similar mishap, and I saw exactly how he was treated. The bits all had to be picked out. It only wants a little courage, but the sooner it's done the better. Let me look at the eyes."

The boy winced as the bandage was removed, but he went through the ordeal of inspection bravely.

" I believe I could do it," announced the young

man encouragingly. "Will you allow me, Professor? I'll need some cotton-wool, that's all—and the eyelids must be forced back. Have you an ivory paper-cutter? Ah, the very thing. Now, Horace, five minutes' courage, and I believe we'll save your sight yet."

He raised the boy and helped him to a chair.

The Professor, pale and unmoved, watched the ordeal, or attended to the young man's instructions through long sickening moments of suspense. Grain after grain of the powder was removed with gentlest care, but soon Lawrence saw that a surgeon's skill would be necessary; fragments of metal were embedded in one eye, though fortunately the pupil had escaped, and the extraction of these needed a sharp instrument. Still he had afforded some relief, and was able to utter cheering prophecies with a degree of hopefulness that stimulated the boy's drooping spirits. The cooling lotion was once more applied; then, feeling there was no more to be done, the Professor went in search of his wife, to break the news of the disaster to her with all possible gentleness.

It was no easy task. The unusual fact of his appearing in the drawing-room at that time, the look in his face, the nervousness of his manner, all bore to Mrs. Wilberforce's quick perception the one stamp of misfortune. Her thoughts flew to

her darling. She sprang up, dropped her knitting, and cried faintly :

" Horace ? "

The Professor felt he could not combat a mother's intuition. He took a seat, and said gently :

" Yes ; it's about Horace. Now, don't be alarmed, my dear ; it's not so very dreadful. A slight—accident—that's all. We have sent for the doctor. Now, now, pray be calm ; I assure you such agitation is needless."

Mrs. Wilberforce sank back on the couch, and faltered but one word :

" Lockjaw ! "

" Lockjaw ! Stuff and nonsense ! " answered the Professor. " What put such an idea in your head ? No ; the boy was experimenting with cartridges, as far as I can ascertain, and one exploded, and has injured the—well—the upper part of his face. He'll soon be all right. Now, don't give way ; that's foolish. And unless you can be composed you will not be allowed to see him."

" Are his eyes all right ? " she cried suddenly. " Ah," as the Professor did not answer, " I know what it means. You needn't tell me any more."

The Professor looked at her, and something seemed to rise in his throat and make further speech impossible. He saw the struggle going on

the paling face, the rising tears thrust resolutely back, the tremor of the hands that clasped themselves against that poor throbbing mother-heart.

"I understand, of course. He must not be frightened; he must not be told." She drew a deep, sobbing breath. "Oh, my boy," she cried faintly, "and we always said he had such beautiful eyes, Horatius."

The Professor glanced away. How odd they were, these mothers! The pathos and bathos of the scene almost upset his hard-won composure.

She did not seem to mind his silence. Her thoughts were far back with nursery days when her boy had been so entirely hers. Of late he had somehow slipped away. He was impatient of feminine society, of feminine ignorance. But now if misfortune was to give him back to her arms, and leave him to her care, she felt almost grateful for its threatened stroke. In his helplessness he would be the child she had nursed and tended with such endless delight, such untiring patience. He would need her care, her ministry, her motherhood. Her face glowed warmly as she thought of it. She turned to her husband and stretched out her hand. A smile was on her lips. The pallor and fright had left her face.

"Come," she said. "Let us go to him. If he is in pain he will need me."

"You are sure you can bear it?" asked the Professor huskily. "You won't cry—break down —unnerve the boy?"

"Not now," she said in her low, gentle voice—the voice whose music he had known for so many years, yet never wearied of. "I am his mother, you know, and he will require me. That gives me courage."

He took her hand and drew it within his arm. There was a strange dimness in his eyes as he led her across the big dusky room.

"I was hands and feet to him once," she was saying in her heart; "I will be eyes to him now if God so wills it!"

CHAPTER XI.

CONSOLATION.

IT needed all Mrs. Wilberforce's self-control to keep back a cry of terror and distress as she saw the prostrate figure, the bandaged eyes. David Lawrence sat beside the boy, holding his hands, and murmuring cheering words from time to time. A faint jealous pang shot through the mother's heart. Of late this young man had been so much more to her son than herself.

He rose at once to give her his place. She dropped on her knees beside the couch, and drew the boy's small hands into her trembling clasp.

"My darling," she said softly, "my poor little Horry! Is the pain very bad?"

The tears rushed to her eyes, but her voice was calm and steady.

"Is that you, mother? No, it's not so bad now. But I wish the doctor would come. Oh, mother, if I were to be blind! Never to see again —never to read my books—and just as I was

getting on so well! Why, Mr. Lawrence says I'd have been doing Virgil in another month."

"How did it happen, dear?" she asked, wondering jealously if these "books" were always to be her rival in his thoughts.

"Haven't they told you? You mustn't be angry with her. I'm sure she never thought what a dangerous thing it was. Indeed, she asked me not to touch it, but to give it to Mr. Lawrence."

"To me?" The young man started slightly, and a look of surprise came into his face. "She meant the thing for me, then?"

"Oh, I'm sure she didn't know," went on the boy eagerly. "She mistook it for another toy that plays music—"

"No doubt," said the tutor drily. "It strikes me, though, that she is rather a dangerous young lady to offend. She favoured me with some views on myself a few hours ago that throw considerable light on this subject."

"Where is she all this time?" interposed the Professor. "I sent nurse for her long ago."

"Was it Mehatabel, then, who gave you the gunpowder?" asked Mrs. Wilberforce.

"Yes," said Horace. "At least, it was a little brass thing. I don't know its name. But it burst up the moment I touched it."

Mrs. Wilberforce's kind face grew suddenly hard.

"That child has been an incessant trouble and anxiety since she came here," she said. "I wish you had left her in that lane, Horry; I really do."

"Oh, mother!" exclaimed the boy.

"For some one else to find, of course," continued Mrs. Wilberforce. "A child like that would soon

have found a protector or a home. I wish I could find out to whom she really belongs. She should leave here at once."

"Let us interview the culprit," suggested David Lawrence. "It would be interesting to know how she came by these dangerous toys, and if she has any more of them."

"Here is nurse," said the Professor, as the door

opened. "Well, where's the child?" he asked in surprise.

"Indeed, sir, she's nowhere in the house; we've searched high and low. I suppose she's off on one of her jaunts again. You might just as well have a wild monkey in the place as that girl."

"I hope she hasn't run away again," exclaimed Horace.

But no one in the room echoed that wish, and the advent of the doctor prevented further discussion on the subject.

A long and careful examination of the eyes led to a more favourable opinion than had at first seemed possible. David Lawrence's prompt attention had been of no small service.

"But the greatest care will be necessary," said the doctor, as the last fragment was extracted. "For four weeks at least he must be kept in a dark room; and it will be four or five more before he can bear a strong light, or look at a book. One pupil is certainly injured, but I hope the sight may be preserved. In any case one eye is safe."

The boy sighed as they laid him back on the couch and replaced the cooling bandage. Nine weeks! Nine long weeks of banishment from his beloved books; nine weeks of enforced idleness, just as mind and brain were braced for fresh exertions! The ordeal was a hard one, and for the

first time a feeling of anger at Mehatabel's foolish trick crossed his mind. To be thrown back in his course of studies; to have to endure pain and inconvenience, and all the horrors of long, blank weeks of utter inaction, for the sake of a girl's silly ignorance!

It was certainly trying. He could not see the tears of relief rolling down his mother's cheeks. He turned a deaf ear to the glad murmurs of thankfulness from his nurse's lips. He only thought he would be condemned to the fussing and tending of women; the stupid nursery life at which he had so long rebelled.

Nine weeks! It seemed an eternity. Two months out of a year! One hundred and eight hours of precious study lost, never to be regained! He sighed impatiently, forgetful in the selfishness of youth of the disaster he had barely escaped, of the tender ministry beside him, of the patient love that would soothe the long, dark hours, and cheer the weary days.

"Don't fret so, my darling," said his mother gently, when they were at last alone in his own room. "I will be your eyes while this ordeal lasts. You can't read your books, but I will read them for you."

"You can't read Cæsar," said Master Wilberforce impatiently.

"No, dear; I forgot that," she said. "But surely there are other books that will interest you besides Cæsar. Perhaps Mr. Lawrence would read that to you. In any case, Horry," she continued gently, "a little rest from study won't hurt you. After all, you are very young. Too young, I often think, to trouble your brains about learning as you do. I would rather see you living a boy's natural life. When you were quite a little fellow—"

She broke off abruptly. He was stretching out one hand towards her in that new fashion of helplessness, and she took it and held it for a moment to her lips.

"Ah, my dear," she said tenderly, "mothers are foolish creatures, no doubt. You see, they can only love."

"You were going to say something about when I was a—a little boy, weren't you?" asked Master Wilberforce.

The loving touch of those gentle lips, the break in the tender voice, seemed somehow to rend asunder a certain hard crust of indifference that had of late come between his mother and himself. He thought how good she had always been, how patient, how long-suffering.

"It's not so very long ago," she said, smiling wistfully at awakening memories. "For you're

only a little boy now, Horry, though you're so clever and have learnt so much; only a little boy to your mother, darling, when sickness or trouble touch you, and I only want to hold you in my arms, and help and comfort you as I used to do, and as you let me do in days when all my heart was full of gratitude to God for His wonderful gift—a little child."

Master Wilberforce had never been a demonstrative boy—never, to all appearance, a loving-natured one; but those simple words seemed suddenly to go straight to his heart, and rouse there a feeling he had never before experienced. His mother had thought all this of him, had loved him so well, and he had taken it all as a mere matter of course, as much a part of his life as his bath and his food.

All the coldness and impassivity of his nature melted suddenly. Love is the only magic wand whose touch wins water from the stony human heart. The boy struggled against this new softness, struggled for the dignity and callousness of the past. But pain had humbled him. The hot smart of tears was in his eyes, the firm mouth quivered.

"Let me lay my head on your shoulder, mother," he whispered huskily. "And just go on talking to me as you used to do when I was only

your little boy. We won't bother about Cæsar—I'll have no one's eyes but yours."

Softly and soothingly the simple talk flowed on.

"I can't say wise things or clever things," she murmured. "How often, Horry, I've wished I was clever for your sake! But when I was a girl, no one troubled to teach me. It was not thought necessary for women to be very wise, or very learned. To take care of our homes and our children, and bring them up to be brave and true and God-fearing, that seemed enough. And some day, darling, when you have grown up to be a man, and are as wise as your own dear father, you will perhaps choose some such woman to be your wife, and let her find her happiness in loving you, as he and I have found ours. For I often think, Horace—being but a woman—that if the world is only a little better because of a child we have born, or a man we have loved, that will be enough to have lived for."

She pressed the small boyish form more closely to her breast. Her dim eyes shone with a wonderful light.

"God has been very good to me," she went on. "A clever husband and a clever son. Not many women are so blest."

He lifted his head then and kissed her. It was the first voluntary caress he had given her for many years. Like most boys, he regarded kissing as a foolish form of showing affection only fit for girls.

Neither of them had remarked the soft opening of the door; neither of them had seen the quietly observant figure standing there, watching the simple scene, listening to the simple words. It was closed again in the same noiseless fashion.

The Professor walked slowly back to his own study, his face grave and absorbed as ever, but a new soft light in his eyes—the light of newly awakened human interest.

"Yes," he said, "I believe in mothers."

BOOK THE SECOND.

THE BLOSSOM.

CHAPTER I.

DESPAIR.

MEANWHILE the author of all this mischief had been almost forgotten, yet to her the tragedy had been of fearful import. When she saw the writhing figure, and heard that terrible cry, prophetic of a more terrible doom, she shrank back into the darkest corner of the room, overwhelmed by the magnitude of her crime. As the boy was carried out in his nurse's arms she rose to her feet and stood staring blankly at the door.

"Blind." That was all she heard. The very silence breathed its echoes again and again. Blind —and through her act! Her anger, her revengeful schemes were all forgotten now. This one overwhelming catastrophe had almost stunned her.

Cold, stony, tearless she stood, her dazed brain giving no assistance to that dumb "What have I done?" of passionate self-reproach. Was it true? Had it really happened? Had her foolish scheme for revenge recoiled on the one being on earth she

loved with all the untamed ferocity of her half-savage soul?

The stillness weighed on her like a closing tomb. Her dilated eyes stared wildly around, seeing in every familiar object a vision of eternal condemnation.

She would never see him again. She could not bear the endless reproach of those sightless eyes, that disfigured face. The thought of it set the frozen blood leaping through her veins once more. She flung her arms up wildly, and made one frantic rush to the window. Another moment, and she was flying with feet winged by terror across the familiar garden ways, over glimmering fields, and threading dusty lanes and meandering meadow ranges. All her life was concentrated in one impulse—to be away from sight or sound of her innocent victim.

Was it chance that led her reckless feet to the wood whence she had drawn her inspiration for vengeance? She could not have told; but in that wood she found herself at last, and in its sheltering depths she fell prone and panting, like some broken-winged bird whose flight for life was ended.

Her heart beat as if it would burst; the veins stood out like cords in her damp brow. All the childish beauty of her face seemed changed as if by a cruel spell. Its wan, haggard misery was piteous

to behold, as she lifted it in dumb appeal to her only God—Nature.

The kindly trees whispered above her. The soft gloom fell around her like a curtain. A wild sob shook her from time to time, but no tears came to her relief.

"Oh, Horry, forgive me, forgive me; but you can't, I know you can't. Oh, never to see again—always black darkness—always, always night!"

She pressed her hot hands tightly to her own eyes, trying in agony to realise the torture of such hopeless darkness.

"It would be better to die," she moaned, "to die like Muttie. Oh, why did he ever find me? Why was he so good to me?"

The frantic sobs burst forth once more; her hands tore up the soft turf on which she lay; her small white teeth clenched on the ripe lips, and bit them till the blood gushed forth.

Mental and bodily pain fought out their terrible duel as she lay writhing under the dark and stirless trees.

There is no grief so hopeless as the grief of the young, for to them the lessons of time are all unknown. The sense of misery held by the immediate moment is an overwhelming sense, crushing out what is best and sweetest of life, holding no promise, bounded only by a limitless despair.

She lay there while the darkness gathered, and the stars looked forth, and the owls began to hoot in the stillness. She lay, and her sobs died out, and one thought began to stir her brain and throb through her misery—one thought, tragic as her nature, desperate as her remorse, unreasoning as her young, impulsive, passionate life had been.

Her fancy played with it till it lost all terror, till it presented itself only as a dream of peace breathed forth by the Angel of Expiation. She lifted her face, white and awestruck, to the mystery of the shining stars and the cloudless sky. She had heard that God dwelt there—God who had made her and put her into this cruel, perplexing world, where will and duty were for ever at variance.

Then she rose, unsteadily, feebly, and gazed down the rough foot-track she knew so well—the track that led to the deep, dark pool.

In the foolish, irrational manner of childhood she had given all the wealth of love of which she was capable to one object. Now she stood to her own self-judgment as the destroyer of that object. Beyond that she thought of nothing. The purpose, and use, and beauty of life seemed at an end; the world for her had ceased to hold interest or desire. He would never wish to see her again; his very voice would only be an endless reproach!

With a sudden dauntless grace she lifted her

head and threw back its tangled wealth of curls, and flew straight as a bird flies to the deep pool with its stirless waters black as night under the shadowy boughs.

One moment she glanced up at the half-screened heavens; one moment she poised herself, birdlike, on the brink; one moment—then her arms flung themselves out to the darkness, and she hurled herself forward and fell heavily as a stone falls into the deep, stirless waters.

A cry rang through the silent woods—a man's horrified, startled cry. He had caught a glimpse of that hurried flight, the flutter of a scarlet ribbon. He had followed swiftly on their track.

The dull water closed; the widening circles crept to the brink on which he stood; his keen eye had marked the spot, and hurriedly throwing off his heavier garments, he swam out to the rescue. It seemed long before she rose to the surface, but she did rise at last, and a few rapid strokes brought him to her side. He grasped the white

frock in one hand, and keeping her head above the water, swam rapidly back.

She was unconscious, and as he stood dripping and chilled by her side, he did his best to restore her to her senses. When at last she opened her eyes and saw him, he was horrified at the rage and terror in her gaze. She sprang away from his arms, and but for his quick intervention, would have flung herself back into the pool.

"Let me go!" she moaned, fighting against his grasp like a wild cat. "Let me go, I tell you! I want to die. Why did you bring me back? I hate you!"

"I know you do," he said coolly. "But for all that I'm not going to let you drown yourself. What a foolish little girl you are! Come, it's time we both got into some dry clothes, and I'm going to look after you. It's no use fighting; I'm a little bit stronger than you are."

She desisted suddenly; she felt her efforts were fruitless. He held her firmly with one hand, while he wrapped his coat around her saturated garments. Then he forced her into a rapid trot, and at this speed threaded the narrow path and emerged presently into an uncultivated tract of land, which led to a small brick cottage he had before noted.

Here he explained the catastrophe as an acci-

dent, and begged permission to dry themselves at the fire. The cottage belonged to a labourer, who shared it with his mother, a kindly old dame of sixty or thereabouts.

She gave instant permission, but insisted on divesting the child of her dripping garments and putting her in her own bed.

Strange to say, Mehatabel submitted to this with a meekness quite at variance with her usual disposition. The truth is, she was utterly spent and worn out by the tragic conflict of feeling.

Scarcely had she been dried and rubbed, and dosed with herb-tea, than she fell into a deep, dead sleep; and David Lawrence came to the conclusion that she had best remain where she was for the night. He rewarded the old dame liberally for her hospitable care, begged her not to let the child out of her sight, and promised to call for her early the following morning.

Then he took his own way homewards, wondering why fate should have directed his steps to that wood on that eventful evening. He had never been there before. It seemed to him that he would never care to go there again.

The thought of that childish attempt at self-murder horrified him. The vision of the white, desperate form, the little figure hurling itself with

such passionate determination into the deep pool, haunted him with strange persistence.

He said nothing of it when he reached Broomville. He heard that Master Wilberforce was quietly sleeping, and that his mother had had a bed made up in his room for the night. No one seemed to remember the waif; no one was concerned at her long absence.

He asked for the nurse, and stated briefly that he had discovered the child wandering at a long distance from the house; that she was too spent and tired to return, and he had left her in safe hands till the morning.

Nurse Doldrum's reply was eloquent of the "milk of human kindness" being considerably soured.

"And a good thing if she'd stay away altogether, sir," she exclaimed. "A perfect devil's imp of mischief, that's what she is. It was a bad day for my blessed boy when he brought her here. I always said he'd live to repent it. No good ever came of meddling with gipsy folk. I've heard they bear the brand of Cain, and I'm sure it's true. That child would murder you as soon as look at you, if her blood was up!"

CHAPTER II.

RECOILING VENGEANCE.

AT a very early hour the next morning David Lawrence took his way to the cottage. The nurse's wish that the child might "stay away altogether" seemed likely to be realised, for the account he received was that she was in a burning fever, and quite "wild-like" and "talking the queerest stuff a body ever heerd tell of."

In plain words, the excitement and shock had had their very natural results, and Mehatabel was in a high fever. To remove her now was impossible. All he could do was to enlist the old dame's good offices on her behalf, and promise to send the doctor round to see her.

At Broomville the news was more cheering. Master Wilberforce had passed a quiet night, and the doctor pronounced his eyes to be going on satisfactorily. The greatest quiet, however, was ordered. Mrs. Wilberforce had to brace up her nerves sufficiently to drop the lotion into the eyes

at stated times, in order to keep the injured pupils dilated.

It was a terrible ordeal for the sensitive boy, and an equally terrible one for the tender-hearted mother. Whenever the bandage was removed, the sight of those poor, discoloured, bloodshot eyes turned her faint and sick, yet her hand was as steady and her touch as gentle as if the process cost her no effort.

David Lawrence offered his services, but the boy refused to let any one touch him but his mother.

Mrs. Wilberforce felt well repaid at last for previous unselfishness. In this hour of pain and helplessness her boy was all her own. No hands but hers touched him, no voice but hers soothed him. The tact, and comprehension, and patience of mother-love were all placed at his service, an inexhaustible store that no demand could render bankrupt.

The boy was greatly concerned at hearing of Mehatabel's illness.

"I knew she'd be sorry for me," he said. "I hope she hasn't taken it too much to heart. Couldn't you go and see her, mother, and tell her not to fret —that I sha'n't be blind after all. You don't know how fond she was of me!"

Mrs. Wilberforce, whose feelings were not yet quite forgiving, promised to go and see the child

when her son needed less of her care. She assured him she was in good hands and well looked after.

"I suppose she ran away because she thought you'd all be so angry," continued the boy. "But would that have made her ill, mother?"

"Mr. Lawrence says it is some sort of fever," she answered. "However, do not trouble about her, dear. She shall come back here again if you wish it, as soon as she is well."

And made happy by that promise, he resigned himself to the bandaged eyes, the darkened room, the inaction and helplessness to which he had long been a stranger.

At certain hours David Lawrence or his father would sit with him, but the excitement of books was strictly forbidden, and even Dick was not permitted a visit.

That admirable youth chafed much at his schoolfellow's absence, and more at the undivided attention which was now his portion during lesson hours. He dared not play truant, because he knew Mr. Lawrence would merely walk up to the Hall and demand the reason of his absence. There was nothing for it but to rouse his dormant powers, and conquer his inherent idleness.

David Lawrence had told him of Mehatabel's strange attempt at self-destruction. It filled him

with an indescribable awe of the strange little creature.

"She perfectly adored Horace, you know," he said to his tutor. "But, I say, what a plucky little devil!"

"I'm sorry for her in after life if that fierce spirit isn't curbed," said Lawrence. "I shall never forget that scene—the determined way in which she flung herself into the pond, and fought with me when I got her out. It wasn't like a child at all. However, the poor little soul is suffering for it now. The doctor told me to-day she's seriously ill."

"Shall you tell Horace?"

"Not till he gets better. I often wonder if he said anything to her, by way of blame—something that made her resolve to put an end to herself. It's altogether so extraordinary."

Dick shrugged his shoulders.

"I told Horry to leave her alone that night," he said. "She always reminds me of a wild cat. She'd scratch you as soon as look at you—and as daring as a boy—nothing frightens her."

"It seems strange her being lost in that manner, and no clue—nothing to trace her by," remarked Lawrence thoughtfully.

"Oh, I daresay they were glad to get rid of her," said Dick cheerfully. "Made things a bit too lively, I should fancy. 'Dipped her fingers in the

stew a trifle too often,' and all that. She was always in mischief here except when Horace looked after her — she would do anything for him."

David Lawrence went on thoughtfully tracing lines on the sheet of paper before him. Life had given him a tendency to look forward into possible results of present events, and he saw the possibility of a worse catastrophe than even that child-suicide, if the passionate, impetuous nature were not curbed, the headstrong will controlled, and the yoke of a discipline at once firm and tender placed about those young shoulders.

Yet why should he interest himself about this stray, lawless gipsy? Had she not openly declared her hatred, had she not plotted this evil deed against himself? As he thought of the ruthless animosity that must have inspired it, he could but marvel at the strange mystery of love and hate knit so closely in that childish heart. The rabid desire to injure himself was only a degree less horrifying than the passionate remorse that had prompted self-destruction. He could not forget it. He felt as if his own act of rescue gave him some right in the life he had preserved. She had been in no way grateful—rather the reverse—but that did not affect the responsibility. But for him, life would have been over for her;

the young, wild soul would have sailed forth on the dark ocean of eternity.

A little chill of fear touched him as he reflected on it. David Lawrence was by nature of a serene and even temperament; he had no strong personal ambitions, and an innate dislike of trouble. It was altogether unusual for him to burden himself with other persons' affairs, or manifest any desire to direct or control them.

And yet—

He started abruptly from a long reverie, utilised by Dick as an opportunity for trying catapult-shots through the open window at adventurous birds.

The tutor recalled him sharply to his work, and set himself rigorously to supervise it; all the more rigorously because his thoughts were less under control than usual. Something had suggested itself to his mind; something that was at once oddly persistent, and oddly unpleasant.

It was a plan at once feasible and suitable—a plan that would place the child in wise and safe hands, and relieve poor Mrs. Wilberforce from a responsibility she dreaded.

All through the droning construing of martyred Cæsar, all through the weary conjugation of Latin verbs, and the mazy labyrinth of the fifth proposition of Euclid, this idea persisted in finding a place. He could not get rid of it.

Weary and impatient, he at last dismissed Dick, and putting on his hat, went out for one of his long, solitary tramps, determined either to think out the matter to its end, or dismiss it as impossible.

Mehatabel lay in the small, poor room of Dame Vicary, her burning head tossing to and fro on the coarse pillow, her wild eyes gazing out from the small window at a strip of blue sky beyond. Days and nights had passed, and she seemed to have done nothing save stare out at that bit of sky, or lose herself in strange and terrible dreams. Vague images thronged her distraught brain, vague memories troubled her, memories of something she had done, the flash of some agonised fear grew as she tried to recall it.

She raised herself on one small elbow and wondered why she should feel so weak and giddy. Then she glanced about for her clothes. She was so tired of lying in bed; she wanted to get up and go downstairs. She heard voices in the kitchen; she wondered vaguely who was there, and what they were talking about.

Her intention, however, was far in excess of her strength. The mere effort of sitting up made her head whirl and her eyes grow dizzy. She sank back on the pillow. At the same moment foot-

steps became audible on the stairs, and in a moment Dame Vicary entered, followed by the figure which, to her distempered brain, was only that of an avenging angel.

Her face grew white, her large eyes had a look of terror as they met Lawrence's kindly glance. He drew a chair up beside the bed and sat down.

"Well, little one, so you're better," he said. "We shall soon have you up and running about again."

She cowered down and drew the clothes about her face. Her eyes alone were visible, resting on his own with something of the terror and unwillingness of a half-tamed animal.

"I have brought you some good news," he went on cheerfully. "You need not fret about that —that little accident any longer. Horace will not lose his eyes. He will see as well as ever in a short time. And he isn't a bit angry with you about it. He wished me to tell you so."

He saw the clothes fall suddenly back; she sprang up, her face flushing, her eyes one wild glow of rapture.

"Is it true?" she cried breathlessly. "He can see? I—I haven't made him blind?"

"Certainly not. It will be some time yet before he can use his eyes, but then they'll be as right as ever. By the way, that reminds me: how did

you come by such dangerous toys, and what possessed you to give him one?"

A frown darkened her brows.

"It doesn't matter now," she said doggedly. "I didn't mean to harm—him."

"I know that. From what I can gather, I was the person to be honoured by that little attention. Were you so very angry with me?"

"I hate you!" she burst out, with some return of the old passion. "You've taken him from me, and now I never want to see him again. I shall always think—"

She broke off abruptly. Again she seemed to see that writhing figure, and hear that agonised cry. She covered her face with her hands. He saw her chest heave with a stormy sob.

"Hush, hush, child!" he said entreatingly. "You'll only make yourself ill again. Come, try and listen to me. I came here to talk to you about yourself. I want to send you away from here as soon as you are strong, away to a kind lady who will give you a home and educate you with a few other little girls of your own age. Are you listening to me?"

She nodded abruptly. He went on again, studying the expressions of her changeful face.

"You say you do not wish to see Horace—at least for a time; and I'm afraid they could not

have you back again at Broomville. Will you go to this lady—at least for a little while? I m sure you will be happy. She is so kind and so good; every one loves her."

"Do you know her?" she asked sharply.

"Yes; she is my mother."

He saw the quick flash of the mutinous eyes, the sudden pallor of the young face.

"Your mother? You want to send me to your mother?"

"Certainly. It is the best plan I can think of. She lives in a wild part of Cornwall—near the sea. You will enjoy the sea. It is as wild and untameable as yourself. You will have plenty of liberty, but you will also be taught such things as will make you a good and useful woman. Mrs. Wilberforce is most anxious for you to go there—for a time."

"Oh!" she bit her lip. She recognised dimly that her mad action had closed those kindly doors behind her. And yet she felt that her punishment was well deserved.

"You will always have a home at Broomville," he went on persuasively, "but we all consider it best that you should not return there just at present."

He saw the quick tears rush to her eyes and roll down her face.

"Why do any of you trouble about me?" she

said. "I'm only a gipsy. I'm not worth being kind to. As for you, I wanted to hurt you; I wanted to blow out your eyes, only Horace took the thing, and began poking at it. I shouldn't have been one bit sorry if it had hurt you—at least, not then. I'm glad now that—"

"You certainly are a very dangerous young person to offend," he said, half smiling. "But all's well that ends well. The taming process has certainly begun. I'm glad you have the grace to acknowledge a little regret. It is the first sign of hope. Now I've talked long enough. Try and go to sleep, and to-morrow you will perhaps be able to leave bed, and next week I think you might set out for Cornwall."

She made no reply. He saw she recognised the mandate of banishment, however skilfully disguised. Mrs. Wilberforce had indeed said to him: "I cannot have that child back. I cannot bear to see her. Arrange for her to stay away—at least, until Horace is less helpless."

He fully recognised how distasteful the child's presence would be. The gentlest natures, when roused, are often the most relentless, and Mrs. Wilberforce could but feel that her charity had met with a very poor return.

So the decree went forth, and some innate sense of justice in that wild, undisciplined creature

acknowledged it was best. While Master Wilberforce was learning the value of long-slighted affection, while day by day his helplessness drew him closer to his mother, and opened his heart to appreciate her never-failing care and her unwearied service, the author of what was, perhaps, a blessing in disguise was sullenly resigning herself to new influences and new surroundings.

With her strange name, her doubtful character, and her unknown history, she was planted in a carefully cultured garden of civilised ideas and gentlest discipline. Mrs. Lawrence and her three other pupils looked with wonder and a good deal of dread at the new-comer. She was utterly unlike any one they had ever known—utterly unlike themselves.

Their life and surroundings had hitherto been calm and tranquil. From what David had felt impelled to say of his *protégée*, his mother felt somewhat alarmed at the responsibility she might entail.

"Give her a certain amount of freedom, if possible," David had urged. "Don't clip her wings too suddenly; she is a strange character. I foresee that no ordinary fate will be hers. I send her to you as an experiment; if unsuccessful, no one will be to blame except myself."

"I hope she'll be happy," said Horace, somewhat wistfully.

He had always felt a strong sense of appropriation in this queer little gipsy.

"I hope she will be taught obedience and self-control," said his mother.

"It's like putting a wild bird in a cage," growled Dick. "School for her! Well, I only hope she won't go playing amateur Guy Fawkes there, and blowing up the whole place when she gets sick of it!"

The Professor alone was silent. He thought of the eager brain, the quaint conceits and vivid fancy, the capacity for passionate devotion and passionate hate.

"Life will be hard for her," he thought, "very hard. What strange fate threw her across our path? Will it link her life with ours again, despite our will or wish?"

CHAPTER III.

THE NEW THEOLOGY.

MEHATABEL did not take kindly to her new surroundings. At first she was sullen, then restive, then defiant. Mrs. Lawrence scarcely knew how to treat her. The three other girls were conventional, well-mannered, and somewhat characterless. They treated the new-comer as an outcast, and in that light she came to consider herself. She rarely joined in their play; she never sought their company. She seemed quite sufficient for herself, and in her joys and griefs she kept a barrier of reserve between her and any possible sympathy.

The first year of school life was hateful to her, but the second and the third glided by, and insensibly she found discipline less irksome and books less distasteful, and began to take the average girl interest in the sheen and luxuriance of her hair, and the cleanliness of her hands and face.

But her scorn of her "milksop" companions did not lessen, and she still had prejudices in

favour of windows as modes of exit, and trees as seats.

She averred she never could learn in a room, and Mrs. Lawrence found this was quite true. Give her her task, and let her con it over in the free air, thrown knee-deep in meadow grass, or perched bird-like on some high and sheltered bough, then she would learn with avidity, and

master any lesson with ease. It was found impossible to curb and restrain her as other girls are restrained. Coercion brought out all that was evil in her nature, and Mrs. Lawrence wisely tempered necessary discipline with a kindly laxity that atoned for it. She did not seem to see many a peculiarity that crossed the borderland of strict

propriety. She closed her mildly astonished eyes on erratic exits, and gymnastic feats.

Like the Laureate, her "faith was large in Time," and she trusted the shaping and controlling of this wild nature to that kindly teacher.

Every Christmas David Lawrence came home to see his mother, and on each visit he brought presents and messages from Broomville; but never among the messages was any request for the child's return—any desire to see her or judge personally of reported improvement. Mrs. Wilberforce paid liberally for her education and clothing, but she could never bring herself to see her again, and each year found her less inclined to do so.

That feeling of exile grew more surely about the young heart, chilling its passionate devotion to those early friends—all, that is to say, except her first love, Horace. She never wavered in her fidelity to him—never for a single day forgot him, or let any other affection take the place of that strange devotion he had awakened. She heard that his eyes were as well as ever, his passion for study as intense, his abilities as remarkable. In those three years he had had no other tuition but that of David Lawrence and his father.

Dick, however, had been sent off to a public school, and was then to enter the army.

Mehatabel never asked questions about these

old friends, but David Lawrence saw how keenly she listened when he spoke of them to his mother, and how no word was lost for all her pretended indifference.

A smouldering jealousy was in her heart; that old jealousy of himself, for sake of which she had been banished from her childish Eden. At times the longing for Horace became almost unbearable. No one knew or suspected how she suffered. Year after year had drifted by, and still no word recalled her. Gradually she came to consider herself an outcast, and to think her sin unpardonable.

The monotony of her life, its calm routine, its dull, daily tasks, roused her to frenzy. The passionate vitality of her nature demanded action, and restraint—even the light and kindly restraint of her present home—was a severe trial. During David Lawrence's visits she seemed possessed by a very demon of wildness and wickedness. Her hair was always in disorder, her frocks torn and stained, her shoes down at heel, and her temper divided between sullen obstinacy and passionate rebellion.

The young man would watch her with a certain grave amusement. To him she was always interesting, and he gave himself infinite trouble to break down the barrier of reserve she persisted in keeping between them. He saw that she was an

outside element in the household as much by her own will as by her discordant nature. There was nothing of the conventional English girl about her, and he confessed, in answer to his mother's laments, that he did not see how she was to be turned into that well-nigh historical young person.

"What is to become of her?" lamented Mrs. Lawrence. "Have these people who picked her up ever considered her future?"

"I'm afraid not," said her son, remembering how curiously unpractical were the Professor and his wife. "But there is plenty of time," he added; "she can't be more than ten or eleven years old. In six years more she will have sobered down, and then it will be time enough to decide what is to be done for her. Has she any particular bent at present?"

"She has a wonderful memory, and she recites poetry almost too well," answered Mrs. Lawrence, to whose refined taste the sonorous, passionate declamation of tragic odes, such as Mehatabel loved, savoured almost of impropriety. "She has another gift," she added; "she will catch any horse or pony she can find, and ride it barebacked! If you can foresee any hopeful results from these two accomplishments, I commend them to your notice."

He laughed, then put on his hat and strolled

out. A scarlet frock and a mass of dusky curls caught his eye as he left the old-fashioned garden and turned seawards; they flitted before him, enticing as a will-o'-the-wisp, and he followed them the more persistently in that they seemed to elude him.

Sky and sea were grey, and flocks of gulls were wheeling to and fro among the rocks, or resting on the gently heaving water. The child was standing watching them. Her great dark eyes held a passion of unrest. The only thought in her mind at that moment was one of envy at the freedom of these graceful, restless creatures for whom the sea had no fear, and the land no restraint.

David Lawrence watched her silently. She was quite unconscious of his nearness till he spoke.

"Would you like to be one of them?" he asked, following her upward glance as it roved in pursuit of one silvery-winged bird, now poising in mid-air, anon wheeling round the crest of an incoming wave.

"They're free," she said brusquely.

"My dear," he answered gently, "nothing is really free. Those birds are governed by laws and restrictions of Nature just as human beings are. The sea rolling at your feet has also a restraining limit, bounds to which it must resign itself. Be-

lieve me, life can never be wholly and entirely uncontrolled. It is not possible. We all have to learn that."

She looked at him incredulously with her great sombre eyes.

"I don't believe you," she said. "If I was a woman, I would do just what I chose; learn what I liked, go where I pleased. It's only because I'm a child—because—there's no one to care—that—"

Her voice broke abruptly; she turned aside. He saw her lip quiver.

"Come, come," he said cheerily, "you mustn't think that. You are cared for, and, indeed, it will be your own fault if you don't win love as other children do. Are you unhappy here?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I hate the girls," she said. "They're so proper, and so clean, and so deceitful. Your mother thinks they're good, but I know better. It's one thing before her, and another thing when they're alone. Ugh! I hate sneaks!"

He laughed.

"You seem to hate a good many things," he said. "Suppose you come for a walk with me, and tell me if there's anything you like."

"You wouldn't understand."

"Am I so dense? At least you might try me."

"The things I like, the things I want, seem

always wrong. When I play Dick Turpin on Farmer Jenkins' pony, your mother gives me a punishment lesson. When I jump through a window, because it's a nicer way of getting into the garden than through a door, I get a lecture. I like to learn interesting things, not dry, silly stuff like the lesson books have. But whenever I get hold of a book I do like, I'm sure to be told it's not proper, or only fit for boys. Why shouldn't girls read what boys do?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said David meekly. "My opinion is that they do, and always have done so."

"Then," she went on dreamily, "I want to know heaps of things that no one will tell me: why the stars come there, and what was the very, very first thing in all the world. I don't believe God could have come out of nothing. How could He make Himself? And then look at the Bible. If no one knew how to write, and they had to trust to memory, how could it be all true? And some things in it are quite horrid, I think. I told the Rector that at last Scripture examination, and he said I was a little heathen. I said that it was cruel of Abraham to send Hagar away into the desert with her poor little boy, just because Sarah was jealous of her; and that he wasn't my idea of a 'pattern man,' as the Catechism says. And why

couldn't God have just let the Israelites go out of Egypt, and not plagued all those poor people so? And why did He make the Devil? If He made everything, He must have made the Devil. How could he have come otherwise?"

David Lawrence tried the usual platitudes about the fallen angel, to be met by the sledge-hammer demand: "If God made the angels in the same image as Himself, and He was perfectly good, how could any of them be wicked?"

Then he fell back on the time-honoured argument of Faith, and that we were not intended fully to understand in this world all the mysteries of the other; that when she grew older she would comprehend these puzzling subjects; but he felt his words made no impression. "Philosophy begins in wonder," says Aristotle, and this child's mind had certainly a full share.

Calamity has made many unbelievers. When life is smooth and all goes well, we don't pause to question the reason, or inquire as to our respective deserts; but when trouble raises its warning note, we speedily find ourselves asking, "Why is this?"

So far, the life of this waif had been complex and more or less stormy. It drove her into making comparisons, and asking reasons; the first silently, the last loudly and incessantly, and in a way that made them difficult to answer. It was

terrible to be confronted with a theory of the vindictiveness of the Deity when He was being preached as All-merciful, and still more terrible to have chapter and verse ready to prove that theory produced by the juvenile controversialist.

David Lawrence found he had let himself in for a very bad half-hour indeed, when he asked her company on that walk, and that the orthodox doctrines of the Fall and the Redemption had never been accepted in orthodox fashion by this vagrant mind.

When she coolly asserted that God, according to the Old Testament, every time He was offended took revenge on the offender, and that therefore revenge was a natural and proper form of retaliation of which He had set an example, he felt more shocked than surprised. But when she gave him proof after proof that this was so from the uncontrovertible authority of Scripture, he had nothing more to say. Indeed, like most young men, his theological knowledge was very superficial, and he had not troubled to go very deeply into the why and wherefore of accepted Christianity.

It gave him a shock to hear those childish lips promulgating such terrible theories, asking such heart-searching questions. To treat them lightly was a burning offence, to answer them satisfactorily was an utter impossibility. That incessant "Why"

nearly maddened him. He was bound to confess that he had not thought much about these matters, and that her best plan was to ask a clergyman.

Then she laughed. "So I have; he can't tell me. He only gets cross, and says I'm a heathen. Well, if I am, it's his business to convert me, and that's just what he can't do."

It seemed to David Lawrence that he had given his mother rather a formidable charge. When he alluded to Mehatabel's somewhat unorthodox views, and asked her how she dealt with them, she simply acknowledged that the task was hopeless.

"I've done my best, and so has Mr. Spicer, but we always dread the Scripture class when she's in it. And I really cannot answer the questions she asks—they're terrible. I'll just show you one of her books. Instead of writing the Scripture essay as the other girls did, she put in a string of questions on the subject, and wrote at the bottom of the page: 'I should like these answered.' What am I to do with her? Punishment is no use, talking is no use. There's no getting *at* her, so to speak. She eludes everything and every one. I do not believe she has a spark of natural affection. I often wish I had never undertaken her education."

"You have done wonders, I think," said David thoughtfully; "but I must say I am not hopeful about her future."

"Read this," said his mother grimly, "and then you will have some idea of what I have to put up with."

She placed the untidy, blotted exercise-book in his hand, and left him sitting there beside the bright wood fire, puzzling over a schoolgirl's ideas of theology.

CHAPTER IV.

DEBATABLE GROUND.

THE perusal of that paper threw a good deal of "sidelight" on the character and idiosyncrasies of Mehatabel. It also showed David Lawrence that Scripture tasks became, in the hands of that astute damsel, a series of innocent traps for the Reverend Thomas Spicer, who in the whole of his blameless career, had never been called to account for the inconsistencies of Sacred Writ as this promising pupil called him.

One extract afforded Lawrence considerable amusement:

"You say I must have faith. You might as well say I must have red hair like Mabel Hayes. I haven't got any faith, and I prayed six hours for it, and it hasn't come yet. So I can't answer these questions, because I don't believe in them."

"Well, that's pretty conclusive," he thought, as he laid the book aside. "What can any one do with such a child except let her grow up in her own way, merely pointing out certain advantages

of morality and civilisation? However, I'll take her in hand these holidays, and see if I can make anything out of her."

Taking her "in hand" was a process of some difficulty, she being as elusive as an eel, and as wily as a monkey. Finding, however, that she had a passion for riding, David Lawrence hired a couple of steeds, and they would go for long scampers together over the rough Cornish roads, and across wild tracts of moor and common that made the exercise more violent than graceful.

But the girl sat her pony like a bird, and was utterly fearless, and apparently never recognised the meaning of fatigue. The greatest pleasure in her life was this daily ride, and her animosity towards Lawrence softened considerably under the charm of his companionship.

He found her an interesting study. She had the rare virtue of truthfulness, and she never broke her word; but she seemed incapable of affection, regarding humanity in general as an enemy. At some rare moment her memory of Horace and her devotion to him would flash out, but every other human creature seemed alike indifferent. This made her difficult to deal with, for it is through their feelings most children are ruled. But she seemed set apart from any such weakness. "I care for nobody, no, not I, and nobody cares for

me," conveyed her disposition and regard of life at this time with perfect accuracy.

She perplexed Lawrence exceedingly. He could not tell whether her unnatural acuteness betokened future virtues or the reverse. He had placed her in good hands, but he sometimes felt that she was almost too much for his placid, sweet-natured mother. She made her life a constant anxiety, and gave neither thanks nor affection in return. She mastered her tasks with ease when inclined to do so, or when she liked her subject. If she did not like it, however, wild horses wouldn't make her learn a word, and punishment had merely the effect of hardening her, or inspiring some act of mischief that involved the whole household.

When the holidays drew to a close, and the time came for his return to Broomville, he left her with considerable perturbation of mind. His study of her character had only assured him that she had an immense capacity for mischief, an utter fearlessness of God and man; that her few good qualities were more rare than lovable, and that there was everything to be hoped for, and little to be expected, from the gradual development of womanhood.

He did not confide his fears to his mother, or, indeed, to Mrs. Wilberforce, who never failed to

question him closely respecting this troublesome charge, but he told himself that unless some incident of life should awake the dormant chord of feeling in that strange nature, he saw little promise or beauty in it.

Horace, as usual, was keenly interested in her welfare. David Lawrence had brought with him the tabooed Scripture book, and he gave it to the boy as a specimen of what he called "The Waif's Progress."

Horace read it carefully, between little bursts of mirth and longings for Dick to enjoy its perusal.

"How on earth did she think of it all?" he exclaimed. "What a queer girl! I should love to see her again."

"No doubt you will some day," answered his tutor. "It only depends on your mother, and she never refuses you anything."

"Does she learn much? What can she do?" he continued eagerly.

David Lawrence ran through a list of accomplishments. There was a quizzical look in his eyes, and the boy's face grew more and more puzzled.

"But, surely," he said, "that's not proper learning, or the way girls generally go on?"

"No," answered Lawrence, laughing, "Mehatabel has a method of her own, and her 'goings on' are certainly erratic."

"You're sure," asked the boy, "that she hasn't forgotten me?"

"I'm sure she hasn't. I believe you're the only human creature for whom she feels a spark of affection. She is callous almost to brutality to other people. It's impossible to get a hold on her. She eludes one at every turn."

Master Wilberforce looked grave.

"Ah," he said, "you'd all better let me have her back again. I think I could manage her."

There seemed something exquisitely humorous in this confident assertion of juvenile influence, but David Lawrence had long ceased to laugh at anything Horace chose to say or do.

"I believe you could," he said, with commendable gravity. "Perhaps I'll bring her back next Christmas, and you shall try."

Master Wilberforce glanced again at the book which he still held.

"I'll remind you of that," he said. "Meanwhile I'll keep this. It gives me some idea of her."

Another year drifted by for Horace—a year of hard study, of unceasing interest in every subject that came in his way. David Lawrence noted no falling off of energy, no slackening of ability, no lessening power. The boy could have found no wiser or more painstaking teacher, or one who

assisted with greater care the development of mental and physical forces. Under his watchful guidance brain and body were alike prepared for the demands of maturer years, and the delicate, ugly stripling had become a strong, muscular, healthy lad. His mother's pride in him was boundless; that one resting-place in the impetuous progress of life had been marked for both with the white stone of an imperishable memory. It had drawn their hearts together in mutual comprehension of joint need and joint weakness. All the purest and holiest feelings of the boy's nature were centred round his mother. She was the religion of his life, and though he made little outward display of his feelings, she recognised them in the thoughtful care, the loving look, the deference to every wish, the willing sacrifice of every desire that was not pleasing to her.

It was owing to this newborn trait of unselfishness that he found himself the victim of a keener disappointment than he had for long experienced.

The fourth Christmas of Mehatabel's banishment came round, and Mrs. Wilberforce was taken seriously ill. An occurrence so unusual taxed fully the resources of the household, and upset all previous plans. The Professor roamed about like an uneasy ghost. His choicest specimens and his most cherished experiments were

alike put aside; his books lost interest, and he cared for no company save that of his son.

All question of Mehatabel's visit was, of course, postponed, for by the time Mrs. Wilberforce was convalescent the holidays were over, and there was nothing to do but wait till midsummer. At midsummer again Mrs. Wilberforce was still so delicate that the doctor ordered her to a more bracing place, and she and Horace went to Ilfracombe for four idle, delicious weeks, by which they both benefited.

The return home was also a return to hard study, stimulated by a period of inaction and renewed physical force.

David Lawrence noted he was more thoughtful and observant. The shadow of approaching maturity was already hovering round that boyish head. He spoke less, and reflected more. The deeper interests of life had not yet appealed to him, but the ground had been carefully tilled for the seed, and to the watchful eyes of his home circle it seemed impossible that the harvest should be anything but good.

His father and mother were inordinately proud of him. Indeed, Mrs. Wilberforce's praise of "my son" began to be a bore to her neighbours, and to no one more than to Grand-aunt Grizel, whose dislike to boys as a "mistake of nature" only increased with increasing years.

It was a regrettable fact that Dick's holidays in no way refuted this prejudice, for his pranks and escapades became more lively and less meritorious on each occasion. He could not, however, inveigle Horace into sharing them. He no longer saw any "fun" in robbing orchards, as a means of avoiding the sin of covetousness; in disturbing hen-roosts, snaring rabbits, or frightening old women in their market-carts by springing suddenly out of dark retreats with an attempt at the time-honoured war-whoop.

Dick declared his former friend was getting milksoppy, and what he could see in these rotten old books beat him altogether!

Each vacation that united them showed a further "drifting apart" in tastes, occupations, and character. That "absence makes the heart grow fonder" is not the most correct of proverbs. Far oftener it makes a breach in early friendships as in early loves; proves the instability of affection, the divergence of interests; turns promised fidelity into a burden, and makes the endurance of once-cherished companionship only a penance instead of a reward.

CHAPTER V.

DREAMS.

INASMUCH as girlhood is always in advance of boyhood, it was not to be wondered at that Horace Wilberforce, when at last he met his rescued *protégée*, felt both startled and confused. Time and accident had again and again retarded that hour of meeting.

She was fifteen, and he a year older, when at last she came to Broomville. He had spent the last two years before this event in Germany, in order to gain a better acquaintance with the language. As to part with her boy for so long a period was impossible, Mrs. Wilberforce had also migrated to "foreign parts" for the first time in her life; and with Mrs. Wilberforce came, of course, the Professor, in no way reluctant to renew a long-past acquaintance with old friends and old places of student days.

Heidelberg was their resting-place. David Lawrence had also accompanied them. He seemed

quite one of the household now, an elder son to the Professor and his wife, a friend and companion in one to the dreamy, unpractical Horace.

At the end of the two years a fit of home-sickness, and a scare of typhoid in the town, brought them suddenly back to England and to Broomville.

Then the long-promised invitation to Mehatabel went forth at last, and the midsummer holidays being at hand, Mrs. Lawrence despatched her to her first protectors with some dread, and yet a good deal of pride in the improvement these years had brought about.

David Lawrence had started on a walking tour which would last for a week, or two, as fancy dictated. Horace had been directed to give books a rest, and Dick had arrived at the Hall, handsomer, noisier, wilder than ever.

This was the state of affairs when Mehatabel arrived on the scene.

Horace had gone down to the river for a row, David Lawrence having left stringent directions as to a certain amount of exercise to be daily undertaken.

In the cool half-light of the summer evening he brought his boat back and shot it skilfully to the small landing-stage. Then he leapt lightly out, gave it to the boy who had charge of it, and turned round to face—a girl. A slim, buoyant

slip of a creature stood before him with a face glowing and ardent as a June dawn, and something of welcome and wonder in her deep, eager eyes.

"Horry!" she cried, and he saw her flush and then grow pale, and the quiver of her lips as the word escaped betokened agitation.

He uttered something, he could never have said what. Was she—could she be Mehatabel?

"Why, how you've altered!" he exclaimed. Then they shook hands, somewhat awkwardly, and walked on side by side.

"Your mother told me you were on the river, so I came down to meet you," she said, recovering composure first with the natural instincts of her sex. "I knew you at once. Of course you've grown, and all that, but your face is just the same." The colour rose warmly in her own once more. "Your eyes are all right. I looked at them first. Have you forgiven me yet?"

"Of course—long ago. It was my own fault for tampering with those stupid things. But don't let's talk of that. I'm so glad you've managed to come here at last. I began to think we should never see you. How do you like school?"

"I don't like it," was the uncompromising rejoinder. "I'd have run away long ago, only I knew you'd be angry, and I wanted to see you

" Have you forgiven me yet ? "

again. It's like a thousand years since I left here!"

She looked round and across the silver river reaches, and upwards to the sheltering woods. Thoughts too deep for words welled up within her heart.

The boy watched her with musing interest. To think that that wild waif could have blossomed into this lovely bit of dawning womanhood! There seemed something miraculous about such a transformation. "Go on talking," he said abruptly, "I want to hear all about you."

"Do you? Well, there's not much to tell. I've broken every rule. I'm always in disgrace. I know some things—history and poetry. I can dance and sing, and ride—well, anything. I hate the girls, but I like Mrs. Lawrence; only I've nearly plagued her to death. I think that's all."

She looked at him again. How tall he was, and how well he carried himself! He was clad in flannels—youth's most becoming costume to the feminine eye; his cap was flung carelessly at the back of his head. The smooth sweep of hair, the dark grey eyes, the thin, somewhat sallow cheek; how well she remembered them all! His voice had changed; it was deep and full now, and he spoke slowly, as befits one who clothes thoughts

with becoming care. With her, words and intonation were alike impetuous.

"All?" he repeated, as their eyes met, full still of that curious wonderment and interest in each other. "Well, it seems a good deal to get through in six years."

"And you?" she asked.

"Oh, I've been abroad, and I've got through a stiff bit of reading. Mr. Lawrence says I could take a First in mathematics if I liked. I can do most of his college papers. He wants my father to send me to Oxford, but he doesn't seem to care about it. However, there's plenty of time yet."

"What are you going to be?" asked the girl presently.

"Be? Well, I've never thought of that. There'll be no need to work for a living, if that's what you mean. I'd like to go in for science, like my father, only on more advanced lines. He's a bit afraid of novelty; so are those old German buffers. One would think the world stood still for them to argue out their dead-and-gone theories. I used to get out of all patience with them."

"And how's Dick?" asked the girl suddenly.

"Dick? Oh, he's all right. He's going to be a soldier, you know. He's with a crammer now. He'll need it, I should say."

She looked at him critically.

"You still think an awful lot of yourself, I see," she observed.

He flushed up to his brow.

"What makes you say that?"

"Oh, because you run down Dick, and—and the old Germans, and seem to think you know so much better. I'm glad you can row," she added irrelevantly. "You'll take me on the river, won't you? And even if you do upset the boat it won't matter; I can swim like a fish. An old boatman at St. Nevin taught me. The other girls were frightened. They'd only dabble in shallow water up to their waists, and scream if a big wave caught them."

"Can you row too?"

"Yes. Mrs. Lawrence didn't like me to go on the sea, but I would. I used to get up at five o'clock in the summer, and practise two hours before breakfast, even if it was rough. I was upset twice, but I didn't mind. Old Scagell, the boatman, used to say it was a pity I wasn't a boy."

"I think so too," said Horace somewhat superciliously. "You seem to have learnt everything that boys do."

"They teach girls such nonsense," she objected. "Playing silly tunes on the piano; a page of melody, and thirteen of variations—squeak and

rumble, rumble and squeak, all over the keys. I don't call it music. And then drawing—all copies, and the master touching them up at the end of the term, and pretending you've done them. And nothing properly explained. If you ask a question that isn't a book question, you get no information. And to be asked to recite, 'The boy stood on the burning deck,' or 'Mary had a little lamb,' as *poetry*. Poetry! Why, I could write better pieces myself, and I have too! At least there was something in them that one could recite. Do you know," she added, stopping suddenly and looking him in the face, "do you know what I mean to be when I grow up and can do what I please? An actress! There! What do you think of that?"

Horace didn't think much of it, for the good and sufficient reason that he knew nothing at all about the subject. He had seen a few plays and operas, but they had not specially impressed him.

"I want to be somebody," the girl went on. "I want the world to know me; I want to do something that will make it know me; and you will see that I mean it. And what I mean I always do."

Looking at the glowing face, the firm-set lips, the flashing eyes, Horace Wilberforce felt that she had expressed herself with some truth. There was no weakness or indecision about her, and she

looked eminently capable of carrying out any intention she might form.

Again he wondered at the change. He remembered also that no one had any right to order her life for her; she would be absolutely free from control. Of the dangers of feminine liberty he, as yet, knew nothing. Perhaps it was as well.

They sauntered slowly on through the meadows. The stars came out one by one, the soft dusk crept up with shadowy footfall. Insensibly the barriers of reserve melted under the charm of quiet eventide. Their thoughts drifted back to the old childish days. Memory arose at their bidding, and left a charmed spell on each recorded incident. How trivial they were, how unimportant, and yet how the two young hearts sorrowed, triumphed, and rejoiced in every record! How near they seemed to one another! Every "do you remember?" drew closer the cords of intimacy, and lifted them out of the commonplace of everyday life.

The Magnetic Age of youth varies with the circumstances of its early development. To some it arrives too late. One touch of the cruel hand of experience robs that brief hour of all its charm. Only the happy few have realised its magic, who can pause pure-hearted on the threshold of an untrodden world, and gaze from thence at a realm of mystery opening and inviting their entrance.

In that hour sex is no longer the unimportant adjunct of certain phases of clothing, hair-dressing, and restriction, but the living wonder that becomes poet, hero, or goddess all in turn ; that sets hearts fluttering, and brains dreaming, and feet wandering into the rosy-girdled land of future bliss.

CHAPTER VI.

UNSAFE GROUND.

"IT seems to come natural to some people to be good!" announced Mehatabel. "Now look at your mother. I don't suppose she ever did a wrong thing or an unjust thing in her life. What a pity God couldn't make us all on one pattern as He was about it!"

"I expect He could have done it, but thought He'd like some variety in the species," said Horace.

They were sitting in the orchard, sheltered from the hot morning sun by the thick boughs, feasting at their own sweet will on fruit that was no longer forbidden, and therefore less appreciated.

"Don't you often wonder how it all began?" continued the girl. "The very, very *first* thing of all? I used to drive old Spicer mad by asking him things like that. No one can tell, really. They pretend they know, but they don't. 'In the beginning.' Yes, but who made the beginning?

How could it have come out of nothing? And then to say this world is the only world. There must be hundreds of others, and all sorts of people in them, I'm sure!"

"Go on," said Horace, laughing. "Do you still ask everyone you meet how eggs turn into feathers? That used to be your invariable topic of conversation once."

'Oh, of course they say it's a process of Nature, like everything else. I've never had any question answered to my own satisfaction yet. Horry," she went on earnestly, "doesn't it seem awful to think of the thousands of things one wants to know and can't know, and if I died I should go out of this world almost as ignorant as I came into it? Yet I don't see how I could be blamed. I never asked to be born, but I found myself here, and I've been so unhappy most of the time, and I don't know what will become of me when it's all over."

"Don't you think," said Horace gravely, "that the same Power that put us into bodies fit for this world will take equal care to provide for us in the next?"

"It's all to be taken on trust, though."

"Well, yes. Unless you can make up your mind to throw the whole responsibility on the shoulders of religion."

"Yes," she said eagerly, "but what religion? They all say they're right—Catholics, Protestants, Mohammedans, Buddhists, Low Church, High Church, Dissenters, Theists, Deists, Agnostics—oh, I've a whole list of them somewhere. I found it in a newspaper, and I used to read it out to the Reverend Spicer. I think he hated me."

Horace laughed again.

"I don't wonder at it. Clergymen think such a lot of themselves. But they can't tell us much."

"Well, to go back to your mother. She is downright good, isn't she?"

"I think she is the best woman in the world," said Horace simply.

"But don't you see she can't help it? It's just her nature to be that. She doesn't try; it just comes as—as my wickedness comes to me, I suppose. Mrs. Lawrence was good too. I don't think she could be angry. She was just as sweet and as kind as if I hadn't plagued and worried her from Monday morning to Saturday night!"

"You leave out Sundays?"

"Oh, I did try to behave then, though it was all against the grain. I generally broke out on Monday worse than ever."

Horace regarded her with silent gravity for some moments.

"Did you ever wonder who your parents were?" he asked.

"Judging from the look of me I should say gipsies," she acknowledged. "But it's not of much account. I'm sure they're dead. After all, I suppose a child comes into the world for a special purpose. Parents are mere vehicles of conveyance. They can't make us what they want us to be if they try ever so hard, and after a certain age we develop on our own lines."

"Good Heavens!" said Horace below his breath. "Where did you get hold of such ideas?"

"That's just it," she said quickly. "Where? What brings them? How do they come? I only know they're in my head; that they seem to have always been in my head, only I couldn't speak of them. Somehow," and her great liquid eyes looked straight into his, "somehow I can talk to you like to my own self. You don't laugh, or look shocked, or say, 'How dreadful! How awful!' like the girls did. Empty-headed duffers! Only caring for dress, and wondering who they'd marry, and for ever talking of sweethearts and lovers! It was sickening! As for learning, they were so many parrots. They got the words off by rote, but they couldn't tell the meaning! And so meek, and simperish, and mawkish! Ugh! I hate to think of them. Boys aren't like that, are they? They're rough

and noisy, I know; but they're not sneaks or cats. Those girls were mostly cats. I hated them all."

"But surely," he said, "that's prejudice."

"Maybe," she said shortly. "But I can't get over the prejudice. I tell you they were cats! All sleek, and smooth, and purring one moment, and claws out the next. They couldn't keep a secret. They didn't know what honour meant. They told lies, and called it a 'little prevarication'; and yet old Spicer gave them full marks for Scripture, and passed the three worst for confirmation! And they only went up for the classes because they could wear white frocks and—veils. They thought they looked like brides! It was sickening!"

"It must have been," he agreed. "I don't know anything about girls myself. Tell me some more."

"Well," she said doubtfully, "I only know those at Mrs. Lawrence's, and I've told you about them. I suppose they're pretty much the same everywhere."

"But you're different," he said, with becoming modesty.

She shrugged her shoulders, encased in a pink cotton gown. Her hair, nut-brown in colour, fell in loose, heavy curls to her waist, kept back from the glowing face by a black ribbon tied at the nape of the neck.

Female beauty was as yet an "unknown quantity" to Master Wilberforce; but even to eyes ignorant and innocent as his own, this dainty shape and richness of colouring spoke in the one universal tongue of sexual attraction. He looked at her with new eyes, he thought of her with new thoughts. She made speech difficult, and listening a delight. She had come forth from the region of insignificance to teach him the lesson of life—the life that holds woman for man's delight and man's worship, his overthrow or salvation.

Grave and musing he listened to her words, lived in her hopes, soared with her ambitions. She could never be commonplace, he felt. Vitality of mind and body thrilled her very finger-tips. When she gave the rein to fancy and talked of that inner self to which none as yet held the key, he found himself absorbed in watching her face, the glow, and flash, and melting tenderness of matchless eyes, the flush and pallor of the young cheek.

He felt overcharged with a new and subtle emotion, puzzled by sensations no book had ever described, no warning had ever given. And such a brief while ago she had been to him but a girl —a wild, troublesome, insignificant girl!

"I wonder what those children find to talk

about from morning till night?" said Mrs. Wilberforce to the Professor.

It was a week since the morning in the orchard since Horace had discovered that golden-brown hair, flowing in waves with curling ends, was surely a wondrous and beautiful thing, and that cheeks with the colour and bloom of a peach were not the common property of girlhood, but a rich and rare exception on which his eyes were privileged to feast.

The Professor followed his wife's gaze through the open windows. Two figures were sauntering across the lawn. The girl's arm was linked in the boy's, their heads were close together. They seemed engrossed in some topic of conversation. They had been on the river all the afternoon. It was now six o'clock, and Mrs. Wilberforce had waited tea with exemplary patience.

"Oh," said the Professor at last, "no doubt they find plenty of topics of mutual interest. Youth takes to youth naturally, my dear."

"The child has certainly improved," said Mrs. Wilberforce thoughtfully. "She is less wild, less mischievous. How wonderfully pretty, too!" she added, with a faint sigh.

"Horace has not given much time to his books lately," observed the Professor, wiping his glasses, and fixing them carefully on his nose.

"He will be none the worse for a holiday," answered his wife. "I like to see him in the open air, and enjoying life like other boys of his age."

"Lawrence does not return for another week. I heard from him by the mid-day post. By the way, he says something about the—the Firebrand. What does he mean? Let me see, where is his letter?"

He produced it after much fumbling. Mrs. Wilberforce read the paragraph he indicated.

"I trust the arrival of the little Firebrand will not seriously discompose you all. Perhaps Horace will exert his influence over her, if it has outlived childish memories."

The Professor folded up the letter again and returned it to his pocket.

The two figures were nearer now; their voices were audible, though not their words.

"He certainly seems to have an influence over her," observed Mrs. Wilberforce. "I think he is the only being for whom she has the least affection. Sometimes I wonder, Horatius, if we did quite a wise thing in taking this responsibility on our shoulders?"

The Professor removed his spectacles and placed them thoughtfully in their case.

"It seemed a duty," he said. "We could not turn her out of doors. Some day, my dear, she

may reward our anxiety. There are immense possibilities in that child—immense."

"I don't know that a woman is the happier for being clever," remarked Mrs. Wilberforce.

"It is curious," said her husband, "how you women always harp on 'happiness,' as if it were the be-all of life. There are more important things than happiness; man was assuredly not sent into the world for that alone. Why should he deem it his prerogative, no matter how poor his deserts? Life has duties, obligations, responsibilities. They are meted out individually. The question of happiness is the question of the emotions only."

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Wilberforce, "that's why women think so much of it. Ah, here are the children, at last!"

"I heard you talking, Professor," said the girl as she came through the window that opened on a wide stone verandah, shut in by trellis-work, now covered by roses, honeysuckle, and creepers. "Were you giving a lecture? It sounded like it. Boom, boom, boom, just as Old Spicer goes on at the divinity class. I hope you talk more sense than he does."

She was apparently quite untroubled by self-consciousness.

The Professor regarded her for a moment with what she always termed his "classifying look."

"I'm afraid we're late for tea, mother," said Horace. "I rowed further than I intended. Why did you wait?" he added, looking round at the untouched table.

"We like to have you with us for that meal," she said gently, as she rang the bell for the long-delayed tea-pot.

Mehatabel had thrown her hat down on a chair. Tidiness was not one of her strong points.

"Horace and I have been quarrelling," she answered. "We got on 'Original Sin.' It's a tough subject, isn't it, Professor?"

"It is considered so," he answered gravely. "Have you any special theory respecting it?"

"Oh, yes. I think Good and Evil were born twins. They entered into the world together, and they've got to fight for the mastery of it between them. It's the only way of accounting for sin. Goodness alone could never have been responsible for evil. Now, could it?"

"It's rather a large subject," he said.

"Of course; but if you think it out, I'm sure you'll agree with me."

"Meanwhile," he suggested, "you might as well turn your attention to the tea-cakes."

CHAPTER VII.

LIFTING THE VEIL.

MRS. WILBERFORCE was right when she said that the Professor and herself always enjoyed that one meal with the children. In this pleasant summer time it was always served in the great old-fashioned drawing-room, the windows open wide to the garden, the scent of flowers, and the drowsy hum of insects, stealing pleasantly through the warm, soft air in pauses of the conversation or arguments that were inseparable from the presence of Mehatabel.

She was a wonder to both the old people, but specially so to the Professor. She represented many of his past theories on hereditary instincts. Her unusual intelligence and extraordinary ideas perplexed him not a little, and left him faintly curious as to the real bent of her faculties.

His views of girls were all undefined. They had naturally been a less absorbing study than metaphysics, or the science of practical chemistry. He

had been a bookworm so long, that when he laid aside his dull volumes and took to turning the pages of youthful minds instead, he brought quite a surprising amount of zeal and interest to the performance.

At times he felt a little bewildered. He seemed, like Rip Van Winkle, to have slept so much of life away that he could not keep pace with these young enthusiasts; and when they dragged him into discussions, or launched him on a sea of the wildest speculations, he was at a loss how to satisfy such unexpected demands.

Still, he loved to hear them talk, and at no time did they expand so freely as at that social tea-hour.

Comparing their mental acuteness with their brief years, it seemed a marvel to his slower brain that so much could have been stored and gathered in so short a space of time. He forgot that eager youth flies by short cuts to its discoveries. Maturity walks steadily on a beaten track, examining each landmark as it goes. He preferred to listen to them rather than to talk with them. Like many scientific men, he had discarded the approved forms of theology as incapable of sustaining applied tests. His simple, well-ordered life had laid no demands on emotional faculties, neither had it been leavened with domestic grievances.

Quiet, serene, content, so he had passed from the labours of youth into the haven of matrimony, and in like manner sailed placidly down the stream of middle life to the frontiers of age. Now, for the first time, he came face to face with turbulent vivacity and impetuous desires; now the clamour of that eternal "Why" was for ever beating at the doors of his decadent philosophy. Of course, the girl was illogical, chaotic, unpractical, but also she was intensely interesting, and threatened to become a very absorbing personality in that quiet household.

Once or twice the thought of her future crossed him, and roused him to a sense of her importance and his chance-bestowed responsibility. She was already on the threshold of girlhood. The rounded form, the slender waist, the full, soft throat, all betokened the dawning of charms to come.

"What will she do? What will she need?" he asked himself, and again and again set to work to follow the kaleidoscopic changes of her moods, the quick flights of fancy, the odd, unyouthful thoughts that were already puzzling out life's mysteries on their own lines.

Meanwhile, Horace Wilberforce was drifting rapidly along the current of a new experience. Life had ceased to be peaceful, but it had become more interesting. He stood confronted by his

own self, but attired in so novel a garb, and capable of such restless freaks, that he felt like one making a new acquaintance.

In these drowsy, idle summer days he scarcely opened a book, unless it was a volume of Byron or Shelley, for the pleasure of hearing that rich, melodious voice read or repeat some favourite piece.

These "favourites," it may be observed, were rarely those selected for school use. From morning till night the two were together; their restless tongues at work, their eager faces brimming over with eager and vivacious sympathy in all and everything around them.

There is one period of youth when it is specially susceptible of higher influences, and the faculty of worship is strong, a moment, in fact, watched for by anxious guardians in order to stamp the momentous future by timely check and warning. These two young souls, however, knew neither check nor warning. They were under no supervision. It was a holiday season for both, and mutual companionship was the only joy they asked of life.

Freely they spoke out thoughts, discussed theories, mapped out a future. In that blissful pursuit they were never separated, still they shared a mental hand-clasp, and triumphed and rejoiced

together. Art for one, work for the other, fame for both, so ran the dream; perhaps each heart held a reservation of its own, a thought that whispered, "How proud I shall be for your sake!" a thought as yet unbreathed, because of some chance shy mood that at times seized them; a mood when each felt what it was to be of an opposite sex.

"Mr. Lawrence returns to-morrow," said Horace one evening. They were on the river; each held an oar, but the boat was merely drifting down with the current, receiving chance guidance at occasional moments.

"Will it make a difference?" she asked anxiously. "Will he want to come everywhere with us?"

"He generally goes about with me," said the boy; "and Dick will soon be here, too. We can have cricket and tennis."

"I think I like the river better," she said.

"Don't you want to see Dick again? He thinks himself quite a man now—I believe he smokes."

She made a grimace. "Why boys think it manly to stick those dirty cigars and cigarettes in their mouths and strut about puffing like chimneys beats me. I hope he won't teach you, Horry."

"I shouldn't do anything I didn't like, simply

because another fellow did it," answered Horace. "That's where the system of schools is wrong. Boys get laughed or bullied into doing the same things, not because they want to do them, but because some fellow, calling himself cock of the school, sets the example, and they think it's fine to follow it."

"Would you like to have gone to school?" asked Mehatabel, giving the boat a gentle impetus shorewards.

"No, I don't think I should have got on with the other fellows. The one idea of schoolboys is to shirk work; now, I like it. Then they're so dirty and rough, and if you don't fight they call you a coward. I never could see the sense of fighting. Of course I've had rounds with Dick; mostly he beat me, but once or twice I came off victor; still, I never saw the sense of it."

The girl tossed back her heavy hair, her nostrils dilated. "Oh! not love fighting—why, I adore it! If I were a man I'd be a soldier before anything."

"Would you?" he asked, regarding her with gloomy dissatisfaction. "That's so like a girl! You don't think of the real meaning of war, only of fine uniforms, and flying colours, and glory, and all that. Now, if it's murder to kill one man who has done you an injury, or whom you dislike, it must surely be universal murder to kill whole

armies of men and lay waste countries because of a difference of political opinion, or a desire to annex a foreign possession."

"There's a great deal in words," said the girl scornfully.

"Yes," he answered. "If you called troops murderers instead of soldiers, it would not sound so nice!"

"But wouldn't you fight for your country if you were called upon?" she asked.

"Which simply means that the blunders of a government demand human sacrifices, and shelter individual blunderers at the expense of thousands of innocent lives!"

"There's nothing of the warrior about you," she said. "I should think it was far better to die gloriously in the face of the foe, and in defence of a cause, than to breathe your last in stupid, humdrum peace like a woman or a child."

"Well," said Horace, with a sudden tightening of the lips, "Dick's views will just suit you. He's all for fighting and glory, and the senseless twaddle that is the catch-word of recruits. Patriotism is only another name for bloodthirstiness or vanity. The army gratifies both."

"If I were a man I would be a soldier," she repeated, for sheer love of argument and opposition.

"I thought you had more sense," he answered, and sent the boat to shore with a few strong, impetuous strokes that seemed to relieve his feelings. It was so silly to lose one's temper with a girl. And their last evening alone, too.

"Don't land yet," she entreated. "It's not late, and you say the others are coming back to-morrow. I suppose you'll have nothing to say to me then?"

"Probably you'll find Dick a more entertaining companion," he answered, with fine irony.

She laughed softly.

"I do believe you're cross," she said; "cross because I said I liked soldiers. All women do, you know."

"And they return the compliment pretty freely," he said sarcastically. "If a sailor has a wife in every port, a soldier has one—"

"In every fort, I should say," she interposed saucily. "Small blame to them. Love and war always went together. I suppose that's why lovers quarrel so much."

"What do you know about—lovers?" he asked, his voice a little shamed and uncertain over the word which she pronounced so glibly.

"Only what books say, and what the girls used to twaddle about. That's quite enough for me."

"Well," he said, regarding her gravely, "you're rather young for it to be anything else. An ex-

perience of that sort wouldn't come in your way for—for some years, I suppose?"

"I hope not at all," she said quickly. "I'm not a bit sentimental. It must be so silly, don't you think, holding hands, and looking in each other's eyes, and—kissing! I do loathe kissing!"

"Girls, I suppose?"

"Well, of course. You don't suppose I meant the Reverend Spicer, or the gardener's boy, do you?"

He looked at the lips, ruddy as cherries, pursed in one delicious pout. It occurred to him that kissing them might be a slightly different sensation to kissing his mother.

"No," he said thoughtfully, "no, I didn't mean that. Was there—no one else?"

"Of course not. I've never kissed *you*, you know. I felt awfully inclined to that evening I came here, when I went to meet you; but somehow you looked so tall, and different to what I expected, that the feeling went off. After all"—and she looked at him critically—"I don't suppose you'd have liked me to do it. You're not a spooney boy at all."

Her eyes brightened with laughter. He, for once, looked somewhat disconcerted. He thought that that kiss—so nearly bestowed—might after all have been a pleasant experience. He could not

join in her laugh. He somewhat curtly bade her attend to her oars, as they were nearing the weir, and then spent a few moments of silent energy on the guidance of the boat.

The water was flashing and sparkling in the glow of sunset. Meadow-sweet hung from the banks amidst a tangle of weed and bramble. A blackbird's last note trembled sweetly on the silence, followed by a few chirping echoes from a little copse. It was in truth a magic hour, charged full of summer's magnetic glory and sunset's tender grace. A spell of silence fell on both. The warfare of tongues ceased. Their hearts grew still and glad, and their eyes met in mutual reconciliation. "How beautiful is youth, how beautiful is life!" they seemed to say.

And the blackbird, joining his mate in the tender gloom of screening boughs, seemed to pipe: "How beautiful is Love?"

CHAPTER VIII.

A TIFF.

"HORACE has improved wonderfully in this last fortnight," said David Lawrence. He was pacing up and down the wide stone verandah with the Professor after dinner, indulging in a cigarette and a little desultory conversation. "He is more boyish," he continued; "more given to out-of-door life. I have heard him laugh several times."

"Ah!" said the Professor, with a glance at the lawn, where a pink-gowned figure was engaged in defending a wicket from the steady advances of "slow" bowling. "I think you are right. The child has done him good. She is very vivacious."

"Exceedingly so," said Lawrence drily. "She has kept you all alive, I should fancy?"

"Yes," said the Professor. "I think she has seen that perhaps we needed it. It has occurred to me sometimes that Horace was somewhat old for his years. Now that child has

forced him out of his groove as—as none of us could have done. They have played, romped, quarrelled, laughed from morning to night; spent hours on the river, hours in the garden, hours on horseback. I don't know where they managed to get horses, by the way; but I have seen them riding."

"And no books?" inquired David Lawrence, somewhat surprised.

"No. Horace informed me he hadn't looked at anything except *Punch* or the *Scientific Journal* since Mehatabel arrived."

Again his eyes wandered to the lawn, and the two quick, restless figures. "How full of life she is!" he said thoughtfully. "Are all girls like that, I wonder?"

"No," said Lawrence, with the faintest gleam of a smile curving his lips. "Not all, Professor. You must take her birth and antecedents into consideration. If, as we think, she is of gipsy origin, there would naturally be a predilection for outdoor life and surroundings. There is something untamed and untameable about her appearance still!"

"She is very interesting," remarked the Professor. "I have enjoyed few things more than to hear those two children discuss the theories, problems, and duties of life according to their own

ideas of them. It is curious that youth should be at once so crude and so far-seeing. It goes full tilt at a truth about which philosophy and reason may have been hovering for years."

"And sometimes succeeds in hitting it," observed Lawrence. "Have you, by the way, ever thought about Horace's future? I mean any pursuit or profession. He is exceptionally gifted, you know."

"Yes, he is a clever boy; a good boy, too. I should say there was no vice or meanness in his nature, eh, Lawrence?"

"I have never discovered any signs of such evil," answered the young man emphatically. "He has very clear views of right and wrong, and their issues. The wisdom of a thing appeals to him more than the pleasure of it."

"I—I have not thought about a profession," continued the Professor. "It would be for him to select one that he thought suitable. As far as working for a livelihood goes, that, happily, is out of the question. He will be comparatively well off. I am an old man, and cannot expect many more years of life. Horace will have this place and a good income. That will render him independent. I hope his tastes will lead him to scientific pursuits; I should be glad to think the name was not to die out with myself."

"You will send him to the University, of course?"

"Yes, when he wishes to go. Surely there is plenty of time before that is necessary."

"He is sixteen; but many youths of twenty haven't half his classical knowledge."

"Ah!" said the Professor, with pardonable pride. "He has to thank us for that, Lawrence."

"It was no trouble to teach him," said the tutor. "I am not sorry, however, that he is giving books a holiday. Youth cannot deny its natural rights without suffering for it. They seem enjoying their cricket," he added after a brief pause.

A loud dispute was going on. The girl declared her wicket was not down by fair means; nasty screwing balls wriggling in from no one knew where wasn't proper play. The boy fell back on the time-honoured argument that girls couldn't bear to lose at any game, and if they did, always wanted to prove it wasn't their fault.

"You should see Mr. Lawrence bowl!" he concluded.

Mehatabel stamped her foot, and threw her bat away.

"Don't be always quoting Mr. Lawrence," she cried angrily; "it makes me dislike him! You seem to think everything he does must be right."

"So it is, mostly," said Horace, picking up the bat and examining it. "Here, Miss Spitfire, you've sprung this handle; and it was my best bat, too. What a temper you have!"

She was all penitence in a moment, and dashed forward to examine the mischief.

"Don't be cross, Horry," she said coaxingly. "I'm so sorry; but you always exasperate me when you talk of Mr. Lawrence's perfections. I hate good people, they seem to be always looking great big capital 'O's' at one; and I'm sure they haven't always been good themselves, or if they have they're sure to be extra bad some day, just to make up for it."

She linked her arm in his.

"Let's go down to the meadows," she said; "perhaps we shall meet Dick."

"Ah!" said Horace, with a keen glance. "So that's what you're up to; hankering after the red coat, eh?"

"He hasn't got it—yet," she said with a scornful toss of the dark rippling curls.

"No," said Horace, with grim satisfaction. "There's a pretty stiff exam. in the way. Fellows can't get in by back-doors now, they've got to grind whether they like it or not; and judging from the way Dick goes on, he'll never pass!"

"You say that as if you hoped he wouldn't.

How mean clever people are! Ah, here is Dick; I shall tell him what you said."

"He won't care," said Horace, dragging out the stumps somewhat savagely. He was wishing Dick wouldn't come bothering round the place at all hours. Hadn't they had enough of him that morning, and the previous day?

"Hallo," said the cheery voice of the handsome youth to whom the Trade of Mars appealed so strongly, "what have you two been doing—cricketing? You don't mean to say you can play cricket?" he added, turning to Mehatabel.

"Horace was teaching me," she said; "but I don't like his way of bowling."

"I wonder if you'd like mine? I was captain of the first eleven at Grover's. I broke two fellows' legs last match."

"Good gracious," exclaimed Mehatabel, "what an inducement to try your bowling! I don't want my legs broken, thank you."

"I shouldn't use the same force, of course. Besides,"—with a glance at shapely black-hosed ankles and neat feet—"I'd never forgive myself if I hurt such pretty legs as yours."

"I don't care about your forgiving yourself," said the girl. "I know that your grief wouldn't mend them, and I find them too useful to risk for a game of cricket. Besides, it's stupid. And

tennis is worse. Why can't people invent sensible games?"

"What should you call a sensible game?" inquired Dick. "Horace has a leaning towards the Isthmian sports, I believe. Perhaps you have a preference for those little amusements by which the Christian martyrs were entertained—gladiators and wild beasts. I could just fancy you turning down a thumb as the arena awaited the signal."

Her eyes flashed wrathfully.

"I should certainly do it," she said, "if you were one of the victims. But you'd never fight beasts, or men either, for sake of an opinion, or a faith."

"How do you know?" he said lazily. "You can't have got at my character in two days, and you won't be so unjust as to take it second-hand?"

"There's no question of second-hand," she said with a cool, direct glance at the handsome face. "I have found two days quite long enough."

"We've done nothing but spar since we met."

"I know. And I heard you tell Horry I was a most objectionable girl. But that didn't offend me one bit. I like people to speak out their minds."

"He said you weren't as objectionable as he expected," corrected Horace.

"Oh, it amounts to the same. I suppose he likes wax-dolly girls with crimped hair, and who

cast down their eyes, and simper, and blush. Do you know a girl can *make* herself blush if she wishes? She's only got to hold in her breath very hard and nip her arm. I've seen them practising it at school."

Dick roared. "How fond they must have been of you!" he said. "Have you any more of their little secrets to reveal? It's wholesome hearing for Horace and me, you know."

She looked at him, feeling a little guilty in the matter of sex.

"No. You'll find it out for yourself some day. If boys only knew what girls say of them behind their backs, they wouldn't have much conceit left!"

"Don't you fancy that we may return the compliment?" asked Dick. "We're not such fools as you take us for, and don't trouble our heads about you half as much as you do about us!"

"Indeed!" she said, with a wrathful flash. "If they were all of my mind they'd not trouble much. Boys are odious."

"There's a hint, Horace," said Dick. "Evidently we're not wanted here. I only came over to see Mr. Lawrence," he added pointedly.

Horace had collected bat and wickets. He turned at once in the direction of the house without the formality of a leave-taking. Those angry

words rankled in his breast. Odious! She had said odious—and for a whole fortnight he had been her slave!

Dick lifted his cap with ironical politeness, then the two marched off, leaving her in possession of the field, but feeling more dismayed than pleased with her victory.

The Professor and David Lawrence were still

pacing the verandah. They looked surprised as the two boys joined them.

"Where's Mehatabel?" asked the Professor.

"Gone for a walk, I believe," said Dick. "At least, she as good as sent us about our business. I don't think cricket agrees with her temper."

The four pairs of male eyes turned in the direction of a pink gown fluttering into far distance.

"She looks as if she were making for the river," said Dick. "Perhaps she'll work off her tantrums by a stiff row. The current was very strong to-night."

"I hope she won't go by herself," exclaimed Horace, with sudden uneasiness. "That's a nasty bit near the weir when the tide's full."

"Oh, she's all right," answered Dick. "She told me she was used to being on the sea all weathers at St. Nevin's. Our river won't tax her skill after that."

"Not her skill, but her strength," interposed David Lawrence. "I am going for a walk in that direction," he added suddenly; "if I can catch her up, I'll give her a warning."

He was off and across the lawn before either of the boys could reply. They looked at each other, then a broad grin broke over Dick's merry, handsome face.

"It's only *boys* that are odious, you know!" he said, with a meaning glance at the rapidly disappearing figure of the tutor. "Jolly fine moustache Mr. Lawrence has, hasn't he?"

CHAPTER IX.

CONFIDENCES.

DAVID LAWRENCE hastened after that flying figure with somewhat surprising speed. He overtook her about a quarter of a mile from the river. Her surprise at his appearance was as evident as her displeasure. She was in one of her worst moods, and flamed out fiercely at the idea of being "looked after."

"Of course I am going on the river; it'll be light for the next two hours," she said. "I want to row myself," she added sharply.

"Certainly," said Lawrence. "But I am going to steer; the current is very strong to-night."

"Not too strong for me; I am used to rowing; my wrists are stronger than Horry's."

He looked at them, slender, brown, sunburnt. A faint smile curled his lips.

"I assure you," he said, "I don't doubt your strength or your skill. I am only asking you to give me an opportunity of judging them."

"Oh, of course, if you want to come," she said ungraciously, "there's no help for it. It seems I'm never to be by myself here."

"Do you find your own company so much pleasanter than other people's?" he asked.

"Sometimes," she said curtly.

"Why did you quarrel with the boys just now?"

"I didn't quarrel. If they said so, it wasn't true."

"No, they didn't say so. There was only some mention of 'tantrums.' I think that was the expression."

"Oh, that's Dick, of course. He thinks such a lot of himself because he's going into the army. All he's fit for. Empty-headed donkey!"

"Oh, come, come!" said Lawrence, laughing. "That's rather hard on the army. And I hope," he added, "that you've not had practical experience yet of the mental calibre of its officers."

"What long words you use! I suppose that comes of teaching. Do you like teaching?"

"Not very much. But I have to earn my living, you know."

"Isn't life horrid?" she exclaimed suddenly. "It seems as if no one could do just what they want or what they like. I was reading up Calvin's doctrines one day, and I came to the conclusion that it's no good trying to do anything. Of course,

if it's all arranged beforehand that you must do certain things whether you wish or not, you're not a free agent, and shouldn't be blamed for being wicked, or praised for being good!"

"I shouldn't advise you to study Calvin," said David Lawrence. "He is rather upsetting for young minds. In my humble opinion, too, his doctrines are the most horrible ever conceived by the brain of man. To assert that the Fall was pre-ordained, with all its appalling consequences, is asking us to worship an epitome of the most fiendish cruelty, or a Creator whose helplessness is only exceeded by His ignorance!"

"You can come in the boat," she said abruptly. "I'd like to talk to you. Things have been puzzling me a bit lately. Horry says I've got to the thinking age. I want to know why things *are*, not to repeat what I've heard they are."

"I've read your Scripture book," said David Lawrence drily. "You needn't tell me you've begun to think."

"It was rather an eye-opener, wasn't it?" she said modestly. "I am not in the class now, you know."

"I'm not surprised to hear it," he said. "Faculties of investigation like yours are apt to be somewhat baffling to the orthodox instructor."

She laughed. "Poor old Spicer!" she said.

"He told your mother I was a natural heathen. Ah, here's our boat. Jump in and take the ropes. I'm not going to let you row."

They pushed off. The light was still bright, the air soft and fragrant.

David Lawrence soon discovered that the boast of strength and skill was no mean one. A few strong strokes brought the boat into midstream, then she headed it down the river with a long, steady pull that roused his admiration.

"You do row well," he said. "I think you beat Horace."

"I do," she said gravely. "I've had professional teaching, you see."

He laughed. "I was stroke in the 'Varsity crew," he said. "Doesn't my glory reflect on my pupil?"

"Oh, he's not bad," she said coolly, "but he let his muscles get flabby before he took it up."

"My mother did not object to your boating?" he asked presently.

"I didn't tell her for ever so long. I used to get up at four in the morning in the summer, and practise when no one was about. The old fisherman who taught me, Jeph Vicary, was such a character! He was a Methodist, like most of the Cornish folk, and he was always telling me about how he 'found grace' and got saved. And he

used to pray for me, sometimes. He said I was a rare bad lot, but that none of the maids about could touch me for swimming, or handling an oar."

"You seem to have a knack of getting on religious topics with every one you come across," said Lawrence.

"Yes, it looks like it. You see, I don't keep it for Sunday conversation like most people. Mr. Lawrence, when you throw up one religion for another, do you call it being converted or perverted?"

"The Anglican Church calls its deserters perverts," he answered, "and the Romanists term all who join them converts."

"Which do you think is right?"

"My dear child, I don't hold with creeds at all. I look upon religion as a matter between a man's soul and the Creator of that soul. No priest or mortal can settle that account for him."

"Well, that's simple enough," she said. "But I thought you were going to be a clergyman once."

"I was. But I'm afraid I had not given much thought to the real meaning of Christianity at that time."

"I think there's two kinds of Christianity: Church kind and Christ kind. They're not a bit

like each other. But I suppose the Christ kind is useful. It's a profession, and it brings money and gives importance to its officials. As far as women are concerned," she added contemptuously, "religion is mostly concerned with wearing their best clothes. None of the girls at school or in the village would have dreamt of going either to church or chapel in their everyday gowns and bonnets."

"What makes you think about the subject so much?" asked David Lawrence curiously.

"I don't know. I can't help it; I wish I could."

A strange look came into her eyes; eager, dissatisfied, far-seeking, the look that speaks of the soul's awakening. He caught it, and wondered a little. She had seemed so thoroughly a child of earth, a creature of woods and waters, wild, and shy, and restless as birds are, unlinked to life or haunted by any sentiment.

He looked at her with a man's eyes, and saw all the promise of beauty that stirs a man's heart, and recognised for one swift moment the danger of the power she would wield. The bud would soon burst into blossom. The level gaze of those frank eyes would ask and read their own influence. Instinctively his thoughts flew to Horace. There might be deep and painful issues from this

adoption of accident. He wondered if the Professor or his wife would foresee and evade such a possibility. As yet, of course, both boy and girl stood only on the borderland of youth. The whims, tempers, and vagaries of childhood ruled their hearts, and gave zest to companionship; but this fierce, tropical nature might burst into flower at one sudden touch of sunshine, and then such companionship would hold danger.

"How quiet you are! What are you thinking of?" she asked suddenly. She was resting on her oars now, and letting the boat glide down with the current.

"Of you," he said gravely. "I was wondering if you would ever learn your real history."

"I don't want to," she answered coolly. "I was flung aside to die or live, as chance directed. I shall always consider I belong to Horace. He is the only person who seems to have any real interest in me."

It struck David Lawrence that the hour of danger might be nearer at hand than he feared.

"Do you care for Horace only because he found you, or because of himself?" he asked abruptly.

"I never thought of 'why,'" she answered musingly. "I only know I do care for him." The colour suddenly paled in her cheek. "Do you remember," she said, "how I wanted to kill myself

because I had hurt him? Oh, I shall never, never forget that time! I used to dream of it, and wake up shrieking; and now, if I only close my eyes and let myself think, I see the whole scene again, and I hear that cry of his: 'Oh, I'm blind! I'm quite blind!' Isn't it hateful how a thing can haunt you?"

"I had no idea you were so sensitive," he said curtly. He was so surprised at her agitation that he tried to calm it by an apparent indifference. "That's only a morbid memory," he went on. "It was a piece of childish folly on your part not worth making yourself miserable over. I'm sure Horace has long ago forgotten it."

"Indeed he hasn't," she said quickly. "We often talk about it."

The young conscience is sensitive, and she keenly resented his tone and treatment of her passionate remorse. Her dislike of him increased, and regretful for a momentary self-betrayal, she once more put forth the carping and disagreeable side of herself for his entertainment. Yet the ferment of youth and youthful desires, the queer contradictions and self-confident theories to which he was treated, had a wonderful attraction for him. There was soul in those glowing eyes, intellect in the broad forehead, a sensuous charm in the full, ruddy lips and softly-moulded chin. Looking at

them all, he felt instinctively that for her life would mean *living;* that she would face its best and worst, but enjoy its fullest. The quick, stormy blood of a stormy race ran in her veins. Culture and surroundings might do much to control, but they could not curb those instincts always.

Horace Wilberforce and herself were divided by whole generations of difference in character and feeling. As peace to war, as storm to sunshine, so the two natures stood. David Lawrence read them both, admired them both, yet breathed an involuntary prayer that Heaven might see fit to keep them apart when the fulness of time should have turned dreamy youth into manhood, and a hoyden into a divinity.

Meanwhile the two boys talked to the Professor, and were rewarded by a sight of his last chemical experiment in the way of fusing gases, and scarcely noted the long absence of the tutor and Mehatabel. To Dick the Professor always seemed something of a magician; but he liked his experiments better than his explanations. Magicians, as a rule, do not use very simple language.

They spent two hours in the study, and then Dick declared he must be going home.

"You might walk back with me, Horry," he

suggested, and the proposition was at once accepted.

Dick did most of the talking; this was the rule rather than the exception of their hours of intercourse. It somewhat surprised Horace, however, when in the midst of a somewhat rambling discourse he was suddenly asked: "What's your favourite name, Horry—for a girl?"

Horace looked at him as if doubting his own powers of hearing. "For a girl?" he repeated; "why, I never thought about their names. The only girl I know is Mehatabel."

"Such a mouthful!" exclaimed Dick. "Who could have given her such an outlandish name? Short ones are so much prettier. A fellow I know has a sister; her name's—Ada."

"Oh!" said Horace vaguely. "Well, that's short enough, at all events."

"Um—yes." Dick seemed to get red suddenly, and to fidget about a good deal in his pockets. "She's an awfully pretty girl, you know," he added abruptly.

"Is she?" said Horace indifferently. "How did you come to know her?"

"They gave a ball; it was for her birthday. They lived near our school, and Jim—that's my chum—got me an invitation. Can't she dance just!"

"Can you?" asked Horace, wondering what made his companion grin so idiotically. He was not up in the manifestations of youthful ecstasy.

"Yes; I've learnt. Oh, we did have some ripping waltzes, I can tell you."

Horace looked puzzled. "I thought you hated parties?" he said.

"Well, yes, I did; but somehow this was awfully jolly. It is a ripping name, isn't it, Horry—Ada? So—so simple, and short, and all that."

"Well, you've said so before. What on earth is the matter with you, Dick? I don't see anything to make a fuss about in a girl's name; it's the girl herself who signifies."

"Yes, yes, of course, Horry, you're quite right; she is much more important than her name."

"If girls are to be considered important," added Horace. "You used not to think so, I remember."

"Didn't I? I—I thought I did that last term, you know. I think I told you about how she used to sit in a line with me at church, and we used to meet her on our walks."

"No," said Horace, "you never mentioned it. You see, I was away your last term, so the—the admiration for Ada's name must have been going on all this time."

Dick looked at him sharply. "What a cold-blooded little prig you are!" he said sharply. "A fellow never gets any sympathy from you."

"Sympathy!" Horace grew more and more mystified. "What on earth do you want sympathy for? You haven't broken any bones, or been plucked for your last exam—yet. What's the matter with you?"

Dick opined sentimentally that some day Horace would know for himself, the pangs, and chills, and jealousies, and delights of—of—well, of knowing such a jolly girl as Ada.

Suddenly a light dawned on Horace. He stood still and faced Dick, and cried in an awe-struck whisper: "You never mean to say you're *spooney* on this girl; is that it?"

Then an abashed and blushing youth acknowledged that that *was* it. He was in the throes of a first passion. It was awful, and delirious, and delightful, and hateful, and maddening; it was, in fact, so many and such contradictory things that Horace gave up reckoning them, and simply let his transformed friend pour out his joys and woes without interruption. The woes seemed to have the best of him at present. The theme was novel, and meant for expatiation. So he expatiated, and Horace listened, and the moon came out, and the old wild nonsense was talked, and the

active youth and the dreamer faced life's eternal mystery with the shamefaced delight of every Adam for whom the night of sleep is over, and to whom the blushing day reveals the divine loveliness of his own and only Eve!

To Horace such rhapsodies were a revelation. To hear Dick—the rattlepate, the mischief-lover, the thoughtless, unpoetic Dick—changed into an absorbed worshipper of a girl, seemed little short of magic. For, of course, he soon discovered the name was a mere secondary consideration—a cloak to disguise the personality of Beauty.

According to Dick, she was a beauty; her hair, her eyes, her form, all goddess-like and incomparable. Above all, she had given him—hope. He had out-distanced a once formidable rival, by name Slade Primus—his senior by a year, and noted for the possession of a dressing-case and razors. The latter he used religiously, and with such good effect that his visage—none too handsome at best—bore a strong resemblance to that of a Heidelberg student after his first duel. Still, Slade Primus had been head of the school, and was now at Oxford, and possessed of rich relatives. To have out-rivalled him in the affections of the fair Ada was no mean exploit.

"And how old is she?" asked Horace, in one breathless pause of long pent-up confidence.

"Seventeen. Quite grown-up, you know."

"But are you really—really what poets and books call 'in love' with her?" asked Horace curiously.

"Haven't I been telling you so for the last half-hour?" exclaimed Dick. "Of course I am. And I mean to marry her, too, when I'm fairly launched into life. It's a matter of three or four years, I suppose, but she has promised to wait."

"Marry!" Horace did not often laugh, but the idea of Dick with a wife struck him suddenly as so exquisite a joke that he exploded into genuine mirth at the thought of it. "You marry! Oh, good Lord, what next?"

"And pray, why not? I'll punch your head if you don't stop that idiotic laughing."

"Well, I should think she—Ada, I mean—ought to punch yours if you ask her to do such a ridiculous thing as marry you!" said Horace, with all the engaging candour of youth. "Why, a fellow doesn't marry till he has a—a profession, or an income, and a house, and all that! Of course, love's a different thing!"

He spoke as the child of instinct to the child of experience.

Dick, looking down on him from lofty heights of attained bliss, did but smile sardonically. Different! Of course it was different! Would

one chain Pegasus to a farmer's waggon, or string an Æolian harp with common catgut?

"You can't be expected to enter into our feelings." He said "our"! "Of course you're too young. But some day you'll know how I feel, and be sorry that you were so unsympathetic!"

CHAPTER X.

FORCE OF EXAMPLE.

HORACE sauntered slowly homewards after parting with Dick.

His mind naturally dwelt on the extraordinary confidences he had received—confidences which showed him so wide a gulf between boisterous schoolboy and love-sick youth. Dick was a boy no longer. He had crossed the Rubicon, and gazed upon the Promised Land. He had tasted the bliss of a first kiss from virgin lips, and learnt the divine secrets of a virgin heart. No longer would football allure and cricket delight. And all because a girl called Ada had blue eyes!

The more Horace thought of the subject the more absurd it seemed. And yet Dick's parting words rang warningly in his ear. Some day he, too, would know the great secret, would feel the same thrill of pulse and throb of heart at the mere sight and sound of a girl—some girl. As yet, her divinity was hidden; silence engulfed and mystery shrouded her, but for all that she was there, waiting

for him to act the fairy prince and wake her from the sleep of maiden peace by his presence.

How wonderful it seemed and how bewildering! He almost wished Dick had kept his confidences to himself—had not thrown open those enchanted gates.

How was it possible that two years of seniority could make such a difference; that Dick, who was such a duffer at Euclid, and could only get through classics by the help of cribs and crammers, should have out-distanced him on the road of life to the extent of contemplating matrimony?

Amidst the pastoral summer scenes, in the sweet summer moonlight, the young philosopher paced with "solemn steps and slow." So that was what it came to! All the wisdom, and all the philosophy, and all the rollicking, random indifference of man led him alike to the footstool of Woman! The wise gods of old had known this; the Fates had spun their magic skeins for this! The law of the universe had framed and built itself upon this, and none might escape!

He reached home and went straight to his room, pausing only at his mother's door for the usual good-night kiss. Somehow to-night his kiss was tenderer and more devout. She, too, embodied this divinity of womanhood; this sacred mystery by which life breathed and throbbed in the uni-

verse; to which he owed his own newly-revealed existence.

He tossed sleepless on his couch as the late night wore on to the new day. Unconsciously he felt that the world of yesterday was over for him. A chance word had sown the seed. It would spring up soon or late beneath the sun of some marvellous influence. He never dreamt how near at hand that influence might be. With the dawn came a fitful slumber and strange dreams. Waking from these, the charm of a dip in the river presented itself as a delightful contrast. He jumped into flannels and stole down the quiet corridors, and was out in the fresh glory of day, and dew, and glittering sunshine, while yet half the world of humanity slept.

No better cure for mental fatigue or excitement has ever been discovered than that cool embrace of dividing waters—the plunge into burnished depths sparkling with sunlight, the cleaving, arrow-like dive, the triumphant rise to the surface, the swift, impetuous stroke bearing the lithe frame onward through an element no longer antagonistic.

When Horace came back to land, he felt like a new creature. The visions and imaginings of the night seemed morbid. This world of gold and green, of light and shadow, this fair earth, rich with beauty, glad with song and sunlight, appealed

to him with their old spell. His body glowed, his heart seemed light as air. The delicious scents of bud and flower, the notes of joyous birds, all spoke in a familiar language. Soft shadows curled away from advancing light. He and the morning stood alone, and rejoiced in their youth. As he shook the bright drops from his hair, his lips burst into song. He had not known he could sing, but harmony and melody floated alike into the words, and spoke of joy in a new strain, but in the old, old fashion.

A voice caught up the air and echoed the words. Then he knew where he had heard them. He laughed as he tossed his cap on his ruffled locks. A towel had been his only comb, but the effect was not unpicturesque. He knotted an orange-and-scarlet scarf round his waist, and called out in the direction of the voice: "I've had my swim. You can come here."

Mehatabel advanced. They never exchanged formal greetings, so she plunged into conversation first.

"How early you are out! Let's have a row, will you? How disagreeable you were last night; you might have come with me instead of sending Mr. Lawrence."

"You said we were odious," answered Horace.

"Naturally we weren't going to inflict ourselves on you."

"But I didn't mean it," she said penitently. "At least I didn't mean you. And when I came home you were out. And I couldn't sleep all night thinking you were cross with me."

Horace looked up in surprise. This frank acknowledgment of his power was flattering.

"Cross! No, I never thought of it," he said; "I didn't know it was so late. Dick and I got talking—"

A sudden remembrance of that conversation made him hesitate. He met her eyes; how large, and soft, and lovely they looked under the shadows of the trees. Were Ada's eyes like that, he wondered?

"Talking—oh! of course he'd talk," she said with fine contempt. "It's about all he can do. When is he going to join his regiment?"

"He hasn't got one to join yet," laughed Horace. "Why are you so down on him this morning? I thought you admired him so much?"

"Oh, he's good-looking," she allowed. "But I don't think looks matter in a man, except to make him conceited."

"And how did you get on with Lawrence?" asked the boy, twisting the rough towel into a

rope as they walked on to the boathouse. "I suppose he wasn't—odious?"

"That word seems to rankle in your mind," she said. "No, he was very nice. We talked about all sorts of things."

"Your 'King Charles' Head,' of course," said Horace. "I defy you to keep that long out of any conversation."

"Oh, yes, that lasted a long time. I tried to get at his views. But he wasn't very communicative."

"And what did he think of yours?"

"I think he agreed with them in a way. But like every one else I've spoken to, he couldn't go far enough back into the Beginning to please me."

"Does it matter so very much after all?" said the boy, with an upward glance at radiant sky and sun. "Life's very pleasant, the world is very beautiful; surely we are meant to enjoy it?"

"If you were in Cornwall," said the girl abruptly, "and said that to one of those old Methodists, they'd declare the devil was setting a snare for you. They think it's quite wrong to enjoy anything. You should always be thinking of your precious soul and hell-fire. I never came across one of them that didn't sooner or later drag the lake of brimstone into the conversation, or believe that Satan wasn't just round the corner ready to pounce on them at any moment, and give them a dip in it."

"Well, we're not Methodists," said Horace, "and it's a pity to spoil such a lovely morning by talking of such horrors. Let's pull down to the sea; it's not six o'clock yet. We've lots of time before breakfast."

"All right," she agreed. "Do you know, Mr. Lawrence thought I rowed awfully well."

"So you do, for a girl."

"You say that so patronisingly. Just as if girls couldn't do anything they have a mind to every bit as well as boys."

"But I don't think you are a judge," he said. "You are rather different to the ordinary run of

girls, if—if what you told me about those at school is right."

"Oh! it's right enough. They were only cats. You push off, Horry, and let's go racing speed, do. I feel all electricity this morning. I want to work it off!"

Away flew the boat at the impetus of strong young arms and elastic muscles. Away, under drooping boughs, past thickly-wooded banks; away down the golden stream, widening and deepening as it reached the bold headland where spread the blue and lovely bay, and so, with peeps of living splendour, and passing glory of sun and shadow, out they swept on to the broad, deep sea, and there rested awhile, and looked and laughed into each other's flushed faces with proud content of an achievement.

"You haven't your watch?" she asked, anxious to time a feat so glorious. "But I'm sure we did it in twenty minutes to-day."

"Hardly," he said. "Twenty-five, I should fancy. What a glorious morning, isn't it?"

He drew in full, deep breaths of the cool air. She had flung her hat on the seat, and the sea-breeze was playing havoc with her loose, rich curls. She shook them back impatiently. "What a bother hair is," she exclaimed.

The boy looked at the thick, waving tresses;

the sunlight caught them here and there, and left trails of gold amidst their dusky splendour.

"Your hair is lovely," he exclaimed suddenly.

She looked at him wide-eyed and amazed.

"Good gracious, Horry! Fancy your noticing it at all. As for being lovely, I only wish you had to brush it night and morning, you'd not think it lovely then."

"Aren't you ever going to think of yourself as other girls think?" he asked suddenly. "I mean about your looks, and—all that?"

"What has come to you this morning?" she exclaimed. "As if I'd ever be so ridiculous as to go finicking about before a looking-glass! And you know you'd be the first to laugh at me if I did."

"No," he said. "I shouldn't laugh. You'll have to think about your appearance some day, you know."

"Ah, when I'm on the stage of course I shall. I know very well that an actress must look just as beautiful as ever she can. But that will be years hence."

She sighed, and bent that graceful head over the water as it rippled by the languid oar.

"What a long time one seems young," she said regretfully.

"I suppose you won't say that once you're grown

up," answered Horace. He was looking at her more critically than he had ever done, comparing her mentally with that Ada of whose charms he had heard so much.

"I'd like to see you both together," he said, suddenly speaking his thoughts aloud.

"See whom together?" she asked quickly.

"Oh, I was only thinking of—of another girl I'd heard of."

She looked at him with wonder, and a little displeasure. "The idea!" she exclaimed. "You thinking of girls instead of propositions in Euclid, and Cæsar, and Cicero, and Virgil, all those old bogies. What next, I wonder? Who is she?" she added presently.

"Her name is Ada," answered Horace. "A pretty name, don't you think?"

"Dollish!" she said sharply. "Where did you meet her—what's she like?"

"I—I haven't met her yet at all," answered the truthful Horace, unskilled in signs of jealousy.

Her brow cleared. "But what did you mean by saying you'd like to see us together?"

"Well," he said, "the truth is, Dick told me about her. He has met her."

"Oh! if she's one of Dick's beauties I needn't trouble. You know what we agreed about soldiers?"

"I know that you were all in praise of them the other day, and now you've taken to running them down."

She laughed. "Oh, I only wanted to tease you the other day. I didn't really mean it. I should hate to marry a soldier! I should feel I couldn't trust him out of my sight. I'm awfully jealous, you know."

"Are you?" Again he looked at her critically.

"Yes. If I care for any one I—I want every bit of them, all their love, all their thoughts. It's horrid, I suppose, but I can't help it. Fortunately I don't care for many people; about two in the world, I suppose. I can't fritter myself away in little bits of affection here and there."

"Who," he asked suddenly, "are the favoured two?"

"Your mother," she said—then her frank, lovely eyes flashed straight into his own—"and *you*, of course, Horry," she added softly.

That flash seemed to strike straight at the innocent, untried heart. The wonder of earth and sea, and the beauty of the morning, and the pulsing life of youth, all answered to its unconscious challenge. All that those past idle weeks had meant was suddenly revealed. Each gazed at the other's changing face, glad and half afraid of the shy, charmed silence about them. A deeper rose

glowed in the girl's cheek. The boy's face paled, and his heart throbbed stormily. Then the lingering glance parted, and they fell from heaven to earth. A rough shout brought them down to the region of commonplace.

"Here, you young fools, where be you a-drifting to? Can't you keep boat's head one way or t'other?"

They were almost into a sailing skiff, flying before the wind, and bearing down upon them as swiftly as a bird flies. Quick as thought they plied their oars—not a moment too soon. A rough oath followed them. It was a strange blessing on that one hallowed moment, but they were too happy to resent it.

"Shall we turn back now?" asked Horace. His voice was tremulous, his eyes no longer frank and indifferent. She too looked conscious, and her colour came and went in soft embarrassment. She only nodded a reply, and turned the boat towards the mouth of the river again. Silently they bent to their oars, and with slow and steady strokes retraced their way.

In a shadowy inlet overhung by willows, and where the current scarcely swung the floating lily leaves, they paused at last. Both felt it was a momentous moment, the eve of a great discovery. Their old friend the blackbird fluted his mellow

note, a kingfisher shot like an emerald spray over the quiet waters. The boy drew in his oar, and bent forwards. Simplicity is often audacious without intention.

"So you only care for my mother and for me," he said. "But which ranks first? Tell me."

The note of entreaty went straight to her heart. There was neither coquetry nor feminine artifice about her.

"You surely know that, Horry, without my telling," she said simply. "You have always been first. You always will be."

Then he felt he had outflown philosophy on wings of instinct. The meaning of earth's beauty and earth's joy touched him, and he comprehended it in that brief moment. "You for me; I for you." The old, old story, the old sweet song.

Nearer he drew, and nearer.

"Then—if you care, give me that kiss you so nearly gave when you met me by the river—that evening!"

She lifted her head. There was wonder in her eyes, a blush on her glowing cheek, a smile—half-shy, half-amused—on the flower-like mouth.

"You want me to—kiss you—Horace?"

"Yes."

The lithe form swayed forwards. He felt a touch like velvet, yet warm with living life. A

quick, warm thrill rushed through his whole frame. He felt giddy and faint as she drew back. He half closed his eyes in momentary ecstasy. What did it all mean? What could it all mean?

Abashed, he hung his head. He wondered if she was angry. He hoped she would not laugh.

One swift look at her face showed it changed, transfigured as his own. The bird sang out full-throated; a ray of radiance shot through the willows' screening boughs; but the human lips were dumb now!

BOOK THE THIRD.

THE FRUIT.

CHAPTER I.

A WORD OF WARNING.

THE magnetic age varies with circumstances, education, and surroundings. To know a thing is not to accept it; nor, indeed, to be absolutely sure of its existence. Hearsay evidence is often taken as knowledge before the mind is ripe for certainty. In like manner Horace Wilberforce had read of love in classic and historic lore without forming any conception as to its actual power or future importance. He was years older in mental ability than most youths of his age, but, unlike them, he was years younger in physical knowledge, and prurient curiosity had held no place in his imaginings. His eyes might have been blind for aught he saw of grace or charm in the opposite sex. A girl was simply a creed in petticoats, accepted on the authority of faith. Of the nature and attributes of such a creed he knew as much as most orthodox professors, who recite a form of words with the vague monotony of theological obligation.

The first awakening came with Dick's confidences and the train of thoughts they opened up. So quickly did experience follow on suggestion that he found himself enchained by a similar passion in a space of time that might have been counted by hours. True, the seed had been sown unconsciously; but the harvest had ripened with amazing rapidity. He had not paused to question the why and wherefore of this sudden revelation. He did not know that youth is often more in love with Love than with the living bit of creation that embodies the passion. For the present all thought and all desire were swallowed up by the new enchantment.

A high mental calibre is generally allied with a certain fastidiousness of nature. Nothing low or impure appeals to it; but it has also the fault of idealising what it loves or approves. In one magic hour the wild gipsy, the unabashed hoyden, had been transformed into a goddess for his heart's worship. All the beauty, and worth, and possibility of life emanated from her presence, and amazed him as much by the discovery as by the sations it had evoked.

Yet, alas! to the outside world, they were only nmonplace girl and boy, ignorant of life, unached by sorrow, untaught by self-denial or any eroic virtue—that hard, cruel, sordid world barred

from their region of enchantment, and condemned to sunless skies and barren air. Unlike more prosaic and experienced lovers, these two questioned nothing of the future.

The immediate hour was all sufficient.

Hand in hand they moved across the dew-wet meadows, talking but little, but enjoying the supreme delight of proximity and the unchecked confidence of mutual comprehension. Life would be the same, and yet how different! The presence of each would hold a new meaning, to which they alone held the key.

Henceforth the river would have a memory. On that sacred bank each heart would build a temple, alight with vestal fires and sweet with notes of bright-winged choristers. But for to-day all had been said and done. They only longed for silence, to sit and dream and marvel what the full and fruitful meaning of this magic hour might be.

The prose of day and its duties brought life to eventide once more. It brought, too, an hour in which David Lawrence had thought fit to sound a warning note of danger in the Professor's ears. Slight and subtle as was the change in the outward attitude of the boy and girl, it had not escaped his observant eyes.

A certain shyness and reticence hung about the

words and looks. That first nibble at the fruit of knowledge had left its stain on their lips.

The frank brusquerie of ordinary intercourse had disappeared. He wondered where it had gone, and drew his own conclusions. But he felt that his long charge and watchfulness of the boy demanded some interference on his part at any critical moment. He could not have a fine career spoilt, a promise of excellence nipped in the bud, for the sake of a girl.

So he drew the Professor's arm within his own, and spoke wise words of warning in his ear that sounded only as common foolishness.

"Two children! My dear Lawrence, what can it possibly matter if they are fond of each other? It is perfectly natural."

The tutor opined that difference of birth made even this precursory fondness a danger. Two or three years hence they would be grown up, youth and maiden, the wild flower and the carefully cultured plant. What then?

The Professor had no bank of experience on which to draw, and could only suggest that every ailment found its own remedy if nature were not meddled with. At which the wise mentor laughed, and declared love to be an ailment where the remedy often proved more fatal than the disease.

"Women," said the Professor, "are man's ordeal.

They must be faced and met. The earlier, perhaps, the better."

"Of course, if you see no objection to the intercourse, I have no more to say," answered Lawrence.

"I have brought the boy up on perfectly independent principles," said his father. "He has always been a free agent, subject only to moral directions. His innate sense of virtue will keep him straight in the future, as it has done in the past."

"Still," urged Lawrence, "if temptation can be avoided, it would mean saving him from possible suffering. You must remember that Horace is years older, by mental and moral computation, than most boys of his age. He would, therefore, suffer more intensely, and love more seriously. Love, as you say, is an ordeal that must be faced. Perhaps it seems ridiculous to think of its being an ordeal near at hand—on the very threshold of life, so to speak—but this girl promises to be very lovely, and is very fascinating, and sometimes youthful memories are tenacious."

The Professor knitted his shaggy grey brows, and let his mind travel into a region of consequences.

"You propose to banish Mehatabel for fear of a possible attraction of sex? I hardly fancy that Horace even realises its existence as yet."

"I should advise you to watch them together before you decide that question," said Lawrence drily, "and then ask yourself what you intend to do with regard to Mehatabel. As far as we can guess she is about the same age, or a trifle younger than Horace. She is not a commonplace girl. Indeed, she has gifts that almost amount to genius. She wishes to become an actress, and, judging from what I know of her character, I should say that a wish and its fulfilment would not lie very far apart."

"She must do what she feels inclined for," said the Professor. "I don't believe in the arbitrary direction of any other life. Its bent has been decided by some power far removed from its accidental environment. Parental coercion has been responsible for many crimes and much unhappiness."

"Then you propose to take no steps in this matter?" asked Lawrence.

"I cannot banish the girl after making myself responsible for her welfare, and with regard to my son's affection for her, I prefer to leave it to the same fate that directed their meeting. If I forcibly parted them now I cannot assure myself that they will not meet in the future. I don't know much of love or lovers," he added, with a faint smile, "but I believe I have heard that there is no force like

opposition. Let them dream their dream, Lawrence. They will come to no harm. The chill of common-sense will fall on them soon enough."

David Lawrence said no more.

What was the use of practical warnings to an unpractical man? A thought crossed him of arousing the fears of motherhood, and placing Mrs.

Wilberforce as guardian of the boy's future interests. At present, however, he let the matter rest. The holidays would soon be over. Then parting would be a natural consequence of this boy and girl fancy. Horace was still too young to have discovered that the other half of the apple held the bitter as well as the sweet charm of the unknown.

In his mental forecast of the character of each, the mentor foresaw trouble to come. A time when it would be as much too late to warn as now it seemed too early.

Love is born in a moment of revelation. Heart cries to heart, "You are my mate. At last I know." The wonder at long ignorance is only exceeded by the joy of the great discovery.

Even the mentor sighed at the thought. He had had his boyish dream once — the fantasy of a first waltz, a slim waist, melting blue eyes, rippling hair, a bashful blush, love-letters, a stolen kiss; a parting, and then forgetfulness had been the natural sequence. It had not seared his heart or robbed him of sleep. He could look back and smile; Horace Wilberforce would no doubt do the same. He arrived at this conclusion soon after he had left the Professor. He had debated the matter with coolness, as one quite outside the wide interests it embodied. Then he sauntered forth into fragrant woods and Arcadian groves, the now favoured resort of the innocent adventurers. Moonlight and shade, and pipe of bird, and song of brook, all these were at hand, unnoticed and unheeded now. Here strolled the two babes about whom Wisdom had concerned itself, and Prudence had uttered her mild note of warning.

The onward flow of intimacy had carried them

into a fuller stream of confidence. A little shyness still lingered about the boy. The girl, true to sex, had flown ahead of him on wings of happiness, distancing him in flights of fancy and unreserved expression of feeling.

How much they had to say, how much to reveal, and yet how little they said, or revealed! Their natures, as yet unblunted, caught the freshness of half-breathed words, and lent new eloquence to world-old themes.

Surely Love should love youth well. No votary at his shrine, no vestal at his altars, can serve him half so faithfully, worship him with fervour so devout.

A listener, following on the track of happy voices, became a silent witness of the close entwine of bashful forms. He paused suddenly under the trees' dark covert, and discovered that to spy on Cupid was not the object of an evening ramble. Nevertheless, the grim irony of a late-given warning brought a smile to his lips.

"It's a pity the Professor wasn't with me," he thought. "He might realise the extent to which 'perfect liberty' of the subject can persist. These pretty innocents have not wasted much time in mastering it. No wonder they are shy of common theories and prose of life now!" He drew out his watch and glanced at the time. "I wonder," he

said aloud, "how long it will take to pipe that pretty duet to its ultimate finale?"

A rough voice broke on his meditative soliloquy:

"Look ye here, mister," it said; "d'ye know aught of that young sweetheartin' pair yonder? I want to know that gal's name."

David Lawrence started. He found himself confronted by a rough-looking man in seaman's garb.

"Why do you want to know her name?" inquired the tutor, not very much prepossessed by the appearance of his interlocutor.

The anxious inquirer opined that that was his business, but added that he had reasons for his curiosity of a kind known as "pertic'ler."

"Well," said Lawrence, as he lit a cigarette, "I'm sorry I can't oblige you; I don't know her name."

The man thrust his hands into his pockets, and his face clouded over.

"Nor where she come from?" he asked. "I've heard she lives at the big house up theer, but she's no child o' their'n, I'd be sworn."

David Lawrence's heart gave a sudden throb. His look grew keen.

"You are right," he said. "She was found one night in the lane leading to Bitton. That youth —the son of Professor Wilberforce—found her and

SHE

brought her home. All sorts of attempts were made to trace out her real parents, but they resulted in nothing. Finally, the family adopted her, and have educated and brought her up ever since."

The man's face brightened a little.

"I'd like to go up t'house and have a talk with the old gentleman," he said. "It's my belief I could tell him summat about that gal. If I had a matter of dates now—how old d'ye reckon she may be?"

"Anything from fourteen to sixteen."

"Ay," he said, "that's what I thought; and a rare beauty too. T'other morning, when I just as near knocked their cockle-shell of a boat, and they too, into Davy Jones's clutches, I sed to myself she was a rare fine gal to look at. And handles an oar, too, as if she were born to't. Well, so she may be, if things are as I fancy. Ain't she got no name?" he added suddenly. "What's she called by?"

"When she was found, she told them that her name was Mehatabel."

The man brought his great rough hand down on his thigh with a sounding thump.

"Well, I'm jiggered if that ain't the ve
o' it. Outlandish I always called it.
the long and short o' the matter is, that t

my darter, and I've been hunting for her this many a year. I was on the wrong tack altogether. I was looking for a woman and child; but the woman left the child behind when she took up wi' that ere d——d circus lot. Oh, it's plain as a pikestaff now."

"Is it?" said Lawrence quietly. "Then perhaps you had better accompany me, and explain the matter to her present guardians."

"I'm willin', sir; it's about time to come to an understandin'. I hope it's not too late. I hope no harm'll come o' this here sweetheartin'. I'm an honest man, though rough, and I'll have no gal trapezing about out o' her station, and takin' up wi' gentlefolks. She'll just have to come right along o' me, and that's all about it."

David Lawrence was silent. Perhaps his thoughts threw a sigh of regret to the groves of Arcadia beyond, where the air was still enchanted, and love still piped his tireless song. Perhaps he deemed it well that Fate had taken matters out of his hands, and relieved him of actual marplotting.

Perhaps, too, he thought grimly how speedily an old proverb would be verified. This course of love promised to be considerably roughened ere long.

CHAPTER II.

AN OUTSIDE OPINION.

THE Professor was in his study when David Lawrence returned.

The young man went in first to prepare him for his visitor. It was a necessary proceeding, as he was in the midst of books, chemicals, and various other amusements of his leisure hours. His thoughts were so far away from mundane matters, that it took Lawrence a considerable time to impress him with the importance of his communication.

At last it seemed to dawn upon him that he was called upon to see an objectionable person and perform an objectionable duty. He polished his spectacles severely, replaced them on his nose, and then suggested that the interview should take place in presence of Mrs. Wilberforce.

"Women," he said, "see into things of this nature as men never can. It is difficult to impose on them. Besides, she has a better recollection

of the first incidents attending Mehatabel's discovery and appearance here."

Lawrence saw no objection, so they went together to the drawing-room, and there summoned the visitor to their presence.

He was a coarse, rough-looking man, and Mrs. Wilberforce felt a momentary revulsion of feeling as she looked at and listened to him, and thought of Mehatabel.

His story had certainly many elements of probability. He had been the owner of a small trading vessel, and on one of his voyages had come across a young woman, "hansom' as a picter," to use his own phrase, who was associated with some half-foreign strolling players. He took her away and married her, and for some time they led a roving life together. At last she tired of the sea, and he used to leave her behind while he went on his voyages. The child was about three years of age when he took a longer trip than usual —to Greenland, in fact—having gone into partnership with another man. He was to be absent a year, and had left his wife and child in the house of a woman with whom they had often lodged. She had a small cottage at Greenwich. On the return voyage he was shipwrecked, and at last picked up by a vessel bound for Florida. Arriving at that port penniless and friendless, he had to

exist as best he could until he could work his passage home. By that time three years had elapsed. When he went to the Greenwich cottage he found that the woman was dead, and his wife and child had disappeared, no one knew whither. With infinite patience he at last succeeded in tracing them to the West of England, where they appeared to have met with a travelling circus and joined it. There the clue vanished. A woman had joined this circus for a short time, but then had died quite suddenly of a fever. Of the child nothing was known; she, at least, had not been brought into the life of sawdust and spangles.

The man gave up the search in despair, and took to his sea life again. For the last year he had had a fishing-smack of his own, and dwelt on this South Devon coast.

That, so far, was his history till the morning when he had almost run into the pretty pleasure-boat containing Horace and Mehatabel. At sight of the girl he, to use his own words, was "knocked ov a heap"; she was the very moral of his lost wife. This led to his making inquiries respecting her, and he found that she had been adopted by the people at the great house, and brought up quite as a lady.

"But I don't want my gal to be a lady," he wound up. "I want her to mind my home and

cheer my old age, and look arter things a bit. I've saved some money, and I can keep her comfortable, and I hopes you'll just send her back to him who has lawful right to her as soon as ever you can."

The Professor looked at his wife. She in turn glanced at the tutor's grave face.

He spoke first. "There is a good deal of probability about your story," he said, "but no actual proof."

"I've told her name, and I've got a picter o' her mother by me—took on glass by one of these here photypographers, as they call 'em. If you don't say my wife and that gal is as like as two peas—well, my name ain't Jim Upcott."

Mrs. Wilberforce's gentle face looked troubled. "If you really are the father," she said, "of course we have no right to keep your child from you any longer. I must remind you, though, that her life and surroundings have been very different to yours. I am afraid she will not take kindly to the change. And she is rather—rather self-willed."

"Ay," said the man. "So was her mother. Many's the wallopin' I've had to give her to break her down a bit. A wonderful sperrit she had, had Muttie—wonderful!"

"Muttie!" Mrs. Wilberforce echoed the name and looked at her husband. "That," she said,

"was the name the child so constantly used. You remember she told us she was dead."

"Ay, ay, my lady, she's mine, sure eno'," said the man. "Blood don't lie, and 'tis writ on every line o' her face. And when she comes in to-night, you must let me see her and have a talk wi' her. She'll mind me some way, I'll be bound. Why, she used to be as fond as fond o' me when she were a little 'un. And such a beauty as she were, wi' her curls and her great big eyes, and sharp as a needle, too, a right down clever 'un! I was mortal fond o' her. Of course I owes you, sir, a debt o' gratitood, and you, ma'am, for all your trouble, and the edicating o' her. Not but what I'd rather she hadn't been edicated. However, that can't be helped now. She'll not have much time for books when she's got to keep house for me."

Here the Professor interposed. "I hope, my good man," he said, "that you will not sever her too roughly from all her previous life. It will not be advisable or even kind. She is a remarkably clever girl, and we are all proud of her and fond of her. My son looks upon her almost as a sister."

"Oh, does he? Sister, eh? Well, in my 'umble opinion it looked a good deal more like sweetheartin' they was, whenever I've seen them."

Mrs. Wilberforce gave a little gasp. Such a

word was like the explosion of a mine in her ears.

"Still," continued the exploder, "they're only boy and gal at present, and no harm done. But it's got to be stopped, sir and madam; that's what's got to be done. I'll put my foot down on nonsense o' that sort. No good ever comes o' people marryin' out o' their proper rank of life."

Mrs. Wilberforce's face flushed warmly. "Your warning is quite unnecessary, my good man," she said. "There could never be any question of marriage between my son and your daughter."

"Well, I'm agreeable, but they're in a fair way to loverin', though they be but boy and gal. And you'd best look arter your young spark in time."

The Professor removed his glasses and surveyed the audacious speaker with mild alarm.

"This is rather an — an extraordinary statement," he observed.

The man planted his feet more firmly on the carpet, and in the attitude of the pictorial British seaman, opined that "natur' was natur'," and young blood would out. But what he would advise was, "Drop it." Let the young gent have a hint that his gal warn't for the likes o' him, and all being said and done, "Drop it."

David Lawrence laughed softly in the background. . . .

There was an element of humour in the drama that amused him, despite its prophetic shadows. Then he remembered the scene in Arcadia, and pictured results.

The Professor, having conveyed in select language that if there was anything to proscribe in this fraternal intercourse it should be done, appeared to think the matter was at an end.

Mrs. Wilberforce then interposed. Who was to inform the girl of the change in her circumstances? Would her father undertake the responsibility?

David Lawrence awaited the reply in some alarm. He looked at the man. Dogged, rough, with no more knowledge of the delicate *nuances* of a girl's nature than of similar shades and technicalities in her toilette; a man to whom marriage and fatherhood meant only authority, the authority of ownership and brute strength. What a battle there would be between the two opposed natures, the two opposing wills! A slight sense of fear touched him, a fear never apart from the memory of that scene in the wood, when the impetuous and distraught child had thought nothing of hurling herself into a watery grave. Would this man trouble to understand her? Would he be gentle or patient with the fiery temper, the passionate nature, the undisciplined heart?

As they debated the question, the sound of

voices came floating through the open windows. Involuntarily all eyes turned to the lawn.

Horace and the girl were crossing it in their usual leisurely fashion and approaching the verandah. The eyes took quick interrogation of each other. The British seaman alone was equal to the occasion.

'It's my gall! Let's have it out on the spot. I'll sleep better to-night for knowin' I've got my darter back wi' me."

A grim smile crossed David Lawrence's lips. He thought, if he knew anything of the daughter in question, that the parental head would be more likely to woo repose in vain after this interview. But he only drew back into the shadow, and waited with some curiosity the result of the approaching disclosure.

CHAPTER III

THE UNEXPECTED.

HORACE paused at the entrance of the window, and looked somewhat surprised at the group assembled in the drawing-room.

The British seaman accosted him playfully.

"Well, young gent, if you've quite done with that young lady behind you, p'r'aps you'll hand her over here. I wants to have a look at her."

Horace stared at the unceremonious speaker. The girl, quick to hear, and full of curiosity, moved him aside and came forward.

"Do you mean me?" she asked.

"The very moral o' her mother!" exclaimed the claimant admiringly. "Yes, my gall, I did mean you. I've been telling a bit o' a story to this 'ere gentleman and his good lady, and the p'int o' it all is that you're my darter. I've been looking for you these many years, and now I've found you I means to take you home straight along o' me. Come, don't you mean to give your

dad a welcome? Have you forgotten how fond you used to be o' him?"

The girl's face grew white as death. She stood there like a stone image, gazing with an expression of horror at the rough sunburnt face and stained shabby clothes of this newly discovered parent.

"My father!" she cried, in a low, frightened voice. "Oh, no, you can't be!"

"But I am," he said doggedly, "whether you like it or not. I've proved it to the satisfaction of this 'ere gents, and they'll tell you it's true. Come, you're not giving me a very hearty welcome."

"My father's dead," she said fiercely. "He was drowned at sea."

"Oh, no, I warn't, my dear. I was near bein' so, I grant, but I was picked up, and I come home a matter o' eight year or more. Then I found you and your mother had gone no one knew where, and a nice chase I've had o' it trying to discover her. She's gone to kingdom come, poor soul!"

The girl gave a sudden agonised glance around, then threw herself at Mrs. Wilberforce's feet, and clasping her knees, cried desperately: "Oh! it can't be true. I don't want to leave you. Oh! don't send me away—pray, pray, don't make me leave here!"

The kind-hearted old lady tried to soothe her.

"I am afraid it is all true, my dear," she said. "This is your father, and your duty is to obey his wishes and live under his roof. But perhaps"— and she laid her hand fondly on the bowed head— "perhaps he will let you remain with us just a

little longer, to get accustomed to the idea. Of course it will be a great change."

She looked apologetically at the British seaman's tarred and sun-tanned visage. "A great change at first," she went on, "but we are powerless to keep you against your father's commands."

"She don't seem to have much nat'ral affection," growled the rebuffed parent. "Of course I don't want to make things onpleasant for parties, and I'm not saying but I'm much beholdin' to you all for bringing ov her up, only 'tis a pity you made a lady of her. If she'd been brought up to work now—a kitchen wench, or dairy help, or summat —she'd have been more use to herself and better company for me. But as things is, they must stand still for a day or so. I'll give her time to think of the change, and I'll rig up a room for her in my cottage. I lives at Tor Point; it's a nice eno' little box, and she can be her own mistress, so long as she cooks me a bit of dinner and keeps the place tidy."

Mehatabel sprang to her feet. "I can't cook," she cried stormily; "and I can't keep my own room tidy, leave alone a cottage. I'll only be a nuisance to you. You'd better let me stay here, and I'll come and see you—once a week or so."

The British seaman roared. "Well, that's a good 'un," he said. "Shaking off your own lawful nat'ral father for sake o' strangers. No, no, my gall, it won't do; you're my flesh and blood, and I wants you—and willin' or unwillin' you've got to come. So make up your mind and just bring a few cotton gowns—no fal-lals, mind you—and be ready to come to my house to-morrow."

Mehatabel stood like a creature at bay, glaring with wild eyes from one face to the other. Then she looked at Horace. The glance spoke "Help me!" and roused him from his dazed and bewildered attitude.

"Father!" he cried; "mother! Oh, we couldn't let her go! Surely she is more to us than—to him?"

"Now, you stow that, young sir," interposed the British seaman severely. "I know what you're after, and I've told your parents, and my advice to you is, 'Drop it.' There couldn't no good come o' marryin' out o' your own rank o' life, and in a few years time there'll be trouble if this 'ere sweetheartin' goes on."

The boy's face crimsoned. How absolutely coarse and commonplace is the prose of parental authority; but he felt stupid, and hopeless, and embarrassed all at once.

"I don't care who or what she is," he stammered at last; "I mean to marry her as soon as we're a few years older. We've both made up our minds for that."

"Ah!" said the British seaman admiringly. "Now we're gettin' to business, I'm glad to say. It's a bit early in years to think o' marrying, still if that's your present ideay, I'd just like to hear what your honoured parents say as to consent?"

The "honoured parents" gazed at each other in hopeless horror, as if asking what was to come next.

"Oh, come, come, Horace, this is absurd, you know," at last said the Professor. "A boy like you! Why, your education isn't half complete yet. You've to go to the university; you've a—a profession, a career to consider. A couple of children can't possibly understand the responsibilities or duties of the marriage state, or undertake them for the next ten years—at least."

"Wal, so I should say," observed the Heavy Father of the comedy; "but I thought 'twere more satisfactory to all parties to hear how matters stood, and what was a-goin' on between them. It's plain you don't want no more o' this—no more do I. So again I says, for the goodwill and convenience of all parties concerned, 'Drop it.'"

"Horace, my dear—" began Mrs. Wilberforce.

He stopped her abruptly.

"No, mother, it's no use to talk; you all think I'm a boy. Well, I'm not very old; but I'm old enough to know my own mind, and so I say again, before you all, when I'm of age I shall marry Mehatabel whether she's in a hovel or a palace. If you let her go from here, I shall follow her. If she were at the world's end, I should find her! Come here, Mehatabel!'

She flew to his side as a bird to its mate. It was a pretty picture to aught but age and common-sense—they have no feeling of artistic fitness. He took her hand in his, and drew his slight form up to what ought to have been a commanding height.

"Now," he said, "in face of all here, I repeat that we love each other—that we mean to keep true to each other—and some day we shall marry!"

David Lawrence smiled behind the scenes. He had heard similar protestations before. The disturbed parents regarded the pair with mutual dismay. They could not understand so rapid a transformation.

"Well, now I've heard your sentiments," observed the Heavy Father, "you'll oblige me by returning the compliment. My gall will live along o' me in her own nat'ral station o' life, as has pleased God to call her (I mind that bit o' catechism), and you, young gent, will likewise do the same wi' your own parints and guardians as is lawful and right; but there'll be no meetin's, and no letter writin's, and no sweetheartin' behind my back. And if so be as in time to come you're both o' the same mind, and your lawful parints and guardians sees no objections, why, then I'll say go away to the church or chapel, and get your two

selves tied up as fast and hard as you can, and may the Lord ha' mercy on your souls!"

He uttered this benediction with so solemn an accent and demeanour that all present felt as if they were in a court of justice, and witnessing the assuming of the black cap.

David Lawrence approached Mrs. Wilberforce.

"Agree to it all," he whispered. "It's the best plan. They'll forget all this nonsense before the year's over."

She breathed relief, and rose from her seat.

"You speak very sensibly, Mr. Upcott," she said. "If they are of the same mind, and remain courting under the—the test you propose, we will consent to think further of the matter. At present it is mere childish folly."

Horace looked at her with reproachful eyes.

"You will see, mother," he said, "if it is folly. I am quite determined on my part."

The Heavy Father smiled sardonically.

"Ay, ay, talk away," he said. "It does no harm, and let's the steam off, so to speak. Things comes about sometimes. Marriages is made in Heaven, so folks say. I don't hold wi' interferin' as a general rule; but this 'ere case ain't common-sense. Well, my word's given, and I don't go back from it. Now, young gent, for yours."

He took her hand in his.

Horace called high Heaven to witness that his intentions were as the laws of the Medes and Persians.

The British seaman then offered a piece of general advice to the effect that they should wait and see. He furthermore declared he should be round the next day at noon to fetch his daughter, and, with an affectionate farewell to that recalcitrant young person, took himself off.

Then Mrs. Wilberforce rose to the occasion, and asked the girl to accompany her to her own room.

Horace, with a despairing glance, wandered out into the grounds, his head bent, and his legs bearing him like a random locomotive power of whose aid he was unconscious. The blow had been both sudden and unexpected. It was a terrible jump from Arcadia to domestic drama and a hoary father. He needed time and strength to compose himself after the shock.

Sad it is that the disease of the apple invariably shows symptoms of calamity at so early a stage.

Horace had but put his lips to the tempting fruit, and now it was snatched from his reach. A sense of injury and injustice raged within him. Fathers presented themselves to his mind in the form of dragons guarding an enchanted realm where his feet could no longer stray. To be called a boy, to be told he did not know his own mind!

Never was mortal man of maturest years more certain of his feelings, more satisfied with his choice! The living, burning youth within him fired his spirit afresh at thought of the appeal in his love's beautiful eyes, the sorrow of her drooping lip, the clinging of her tender arms.

And they were to be parted by the rude hand of common-sense.

Common-sense could not recognise the delicate fibres of mutual attraction woven about each life—fair tendrils of long association, ethereal, tender, strong, too beautiful for rough touch of grosser beings. He stood apart in his own sight from all others of his kind. Other youths might be fickle, unstable, but never he — Horace Wilberforce — champion of the new School of Independence, hero and master of his own fate, sign-post of a system as novel as it had proved successful. Not know his own mind! Shades of Ulysses, and Paris, and Ajax, and all dead heroes and true lovers of yore! He had known his mind and the stability of his character from the days when he had resolved on his own form of education, and dieted, and studied, and ordered himself and others by right of superior mental abilities! And now, for the first time in his life, and at its most important juncture, he was met with a check.

His love and he could but gaze despairingly on

a shattered dream, its exquisite fragility destroyed by the rough handling of a Heavy Father! No wonder he paced the earth as one distraught; no wonder he evoked all possible and impossible aid in Love's service!

And the moon looked down, and the quiet stars came out, and the old, old voice of Nature spoke only its never-ending truth: "We are born; we suffer; we die. It is the law of life."

CHAPTER IV.

SPRING AND WINTER.

WHILE Horace was rehearsing tragedy, and posing to himself as the victim of forbidden love, Mrs. Wilberforce was undergoing a very terrible *quart d'heure* indeed, in the company of a feminine tornado. Wisely enough she gave her her head at first, watching the superfluous but never ungraceful energy of youth expend itself in sweeping excursions up and down the carpet, in stormy words and contradictory assertions.

"Now, my dear, try and quiet yourself, and listen to me," she at last implored. "You are too young and too impetuous to understand that duty, however hard, is the one imperative obligation of life. In this instance you are rebelling against it quite uselessly. You appeal to me against your father when I have distinctly told you that his will must be your law for the future. I can quite understand your reluctance to leave us. I can see, too, that I have not been quite wise in my method of bringing you up. The change from a higher to

a lower position in life is naturally more trying than one from a lower to a higher. Still, you will be happier and more content if you try to please your father and obey him, than if you resolutely set yourself in rebellion against him."

The girl stood quite still, listening to the gentle persuasive voice that had always influenced her. She marvelled how one could ever grow old and take life calmly. Would she ever become a placid, even-tempered being like this? Would her eyes lose their lustre, her hair its rich colouring, her peach-like cheeks become like these, where the faint pink colour only showed itself like delicately severed sprays of seaweed?

"I don't so much mind the living with my father—if he *is* my father—I don't feel it yet," she said, "but it's what he said about Horace. Oh, I'm so fond of Horry! There's no one in the world I love as I love him. When that—that cruel man said we mustn't see, or speak, or write to one another, I felt just as I did when I tried to drown myself; as if life was all at an end. I didn't want to go on with it."

She threw herself down beside Mrs. Wilberforce, and burst into tempestuous sobs.

"Oh, if I must go," she pleaded, "let us meet sometimes. Don't put me quite away out of your life. I'll be good, and I'll read, and study, and try

to be clever as—as Horry would like me to be; but if I don't see him I shall die—I know I shall. You don't know how fond I am of him."

Poor Mrs. Wilberforce—poor British mother—forced to confront the tragic consequence of a *mésalliance*, or the deeper tragedy of a broken heart!

In all her simple, untroubled life she had found no such difficulty. Who would have dreamt that a simple act of charity could have produced such complications? Almost it made one—regret. At least it raised doubts as to that virtue being of such merit as had been declared on the best authority.

But to preach patience and endurance to a whirlwind in petticoats was quite beyond the good old lady's power. She temporised, she promised to plead with the British seaman for a less arbitrary decision, and to secure the promise of an occasional visit to Broomville for his daughter. Her conscience rebuked her for tampering thus with a pronounced authority; her heart quaked before a stormy period of youthful loves, jealousies, and exactions. It quaked more before such a possible daughter-in-law. But there, of course, Horace must decide. He had been a free agent so long, he had learnt to hold so just a balance of virtue and integrity, that to enforce a long-withheld authority now would be supremely ridiculous.

Advice he must receive, warning he must listen to; but neither father nor mother could at this late hour assume arms of insistence, or issue commands that he would consider arbitrary.

She temporised, and poured wise counsel into unheeding ears, and told herself, for her own consolation, that this was only a boy and girl episode —it would never come to a serious conclusion. Long before Horace was twenty-one—a date he appeared to have selected in his own mind as suitable to the marriage state—he would have forgotten this low-born, half-wild creature, with her strange beauty and undisciplined nature. She, too, would have got over a girl's romance, a childish fidelity. Time was their truest friend, and time alone would serve them in this dilemma.

So she soothed the girl as best she could, being genuinely distressed by her passionate grief. She herself had known no such emotions, experienced no such fever of longing in the calm years of spinsterhood. Marriage, to her, had been but the gentle gliding into a welcome port, the restraint of sure anchorage. Neither in girlhood nor womanhood had she felt the pangs and pains of passion, or gauged the depths of a despair such as this strange creature unveiled to her astonished eyes.

Still, the common needs of a common sex made her very gentle in dealing with the girl, and

she had dried her tears and bathed her eyes, and was able to descend to the drawing-room once more, before Horace himself had succeeded in calming his agitation, or satisfactorily settled the claims of Parents versus Love.

It was their last evening—for a time at least. But a week holds all eternity for parted lovers.

The three elders made no comment on the scarce-tasted meal, or the haste with which the table was left for the more inviting delights of a moonlit garden.

The Professor's gaze was reflective; his wife sighed; the tutor lifted wise brows and smiled the smile of one who knows.

Outside, the two complainants against Fate bemoaned their lot, and chanted a pathetic litany of griefs.

They could not grasp the great truth that this world is well designed, since in that world they could no longer live and love together. To be happy apart now that they had discovered their mutual need, was indeed impossible. They attempted no consolation. Where, indeed, could such a thing be found? It was but a fortnight since they had sailed forth into love's land, since a chance word, the magic of a kiss, had opened the gates of enchantment. A fortnight; two

whole weeks of bliss and mutual delight, outpoured confidence, pure dreams, poetic dalliance, peeps of revelling joy! This had been their portion. Had they been older and wiser they might have thanked Fate for so much, instead of blaming it for so little.

At last the duet grew more tender and less mournful.

"I can't be parted from you, dear. I must come and see you. I shall not give my word," announced Horace.

"Oh, no, it would be awful, Horry." Then,—suggestively, "Tor Point is not very far away."

"And I suppose he goes fishing? You'll be alone sometimes. You won't promise what he asked?"

"Never, Horry. Not for fifty fathers. Oh, if we were only a little older!"

"We could run away and get married," said the boy.

Alas! And but two weeks back, who so scornful of the marriage state, so unsympathetic to lovers' woes, as exemplified by another? Truly time had proved a galloping steed to Horace Wilberforce.

The girl hung back a little at that suggestion.

"That wouldn't be so nice as just being sweethearts," she said. "Oh, Horry, who in the world so clever and so good as you?"

"Or so beautiful as you, darling? Those eyes, who can match them?"

He quoted Herrick, and she clung to his arm entranced, subdued.

"Your mother was so kind, Horry," she went on presently. "She will persuade my father to let me come here sometimes to stay. Oh, why can't he leave me alone? What use can I be to him? I can't cook, I've never learnt to keep a house tidy. Will he expect me to scrub, and clean, and wash? Oh, Horry!"

She shuddered, and bent a weeping face on his shoulder. Her voice ebbed into plaintive murmurs.

He, too, took up the burden of lamentation. His divinity to turn into a fisher maiden, a scourer of floors, and a person of general utility! It was Princess Curly Locks over again. Fear joined in as the chorus, and struck a discordant note in these minor harmonies.

"You'll be going to the university soon, Horry. You'll mix with other young men. They'll make you ashamed of a common cottage girl. You'll soon forget, but I—"

Then came that wondrous moment of sweet perjuries at which mighty Jove has so often shaken his sides with colossal laughter. The young lover rang the changes on the annihilation of time with all youth's fervour and impetuosity. She believed

him. It was the only right and natural thing to do. She was infinitely more romantic and impressionable than himself, and belief came easy. Had he not been the idol of her heart from childhood upward? All that heart went out to him now in one fervent outburst of love, and grief, and longing.

Ah! sweet, foolish youth, intense in its loves and hates, inconsolable in its sorrows! Let us laugh as we please in later years when the pulse-beat is calm, and the heart has learnt wisdom. Let us laugh, sage and matron! But perchance a tear is behind the laughter, a regret sighs through the wise words. Passion has been ground into powder long since in the world's crushing-mill; but oh! the young corn and the waving grain were fair to see as they waved in the summer breeze and laughed in the golden sunshine!

CHAPTER V.

THE HORNS OF A DILEMMA.

WHILE Love tuned his lyre to mournful melody, Sense and Age took counsel together over the unwonted intrusion of Cupid into so well-ordered and well-balanced a household. Sense, as represented by David Lawrence, gave the usual prosaic consolation to Age as represented by the Professor. This was merely an episode, an aberration of the brain, the magnetic attraction of sexual difference acting on the first discovery of its existence.

"My dear sir, we all go through it," he said.

"I," said the Professor, "have no recollection of —of such an episode at such an extremely early age. I am, I must confess, somewhat at a loss how to deal with it."

He looked appealingly at the wise young mentor. It did not occur to him that the gravity of the situation appealed less to that astute authority than its comedy.

"You will remember," he observed, "that I warned you of such a possibility."

"True, you foresaw a danger in advance. But the question before me now is, how to deal with it?"

"Don't you think," said Lawrence, "that the fisherman may safely be trusted to do that? He will look after his daughter, you may be sure. As for Horace—"

"Yes, yes," said the Professor eagerly, "Horace —that is the important point. What are we to do with Horace? I should be sorry to hurt his feelings; I should be equally sorry to let it appear that in this, to him, important crisis of his life he received no sympathy from those who ought naturally to bestow it. The boy is not quite like other boys. His bringing-up has been one tending to encourage individuality of character. Therefore general rules will not suit his case. When a boy, hitherto so undemonstrative, manifests such strong affection, it reveals possibilities that cannot be ignored. You know my love for my son, my pride in him, my anxiety for his moral good. His happiness or grief would be a paramount consideration with me in dealing with any expressed desire."

"But really, Professor," observed Lawrence, "you take this boyish fancy a little too seriously. Horace knows nothing yet of life, of the world, of men and women, beyond his small circle of experi-

ence. He ought to travel, see other cities, other customs; have his eyes opened, in fact, and his wits quickened. Believe me, that will be the best cure for a romantic fancy born of a pretty face,—a few idle days and—propinquity."

"You think, then, the matter is not serious—it will not affect him materially?"

"I am sure it will not. He may suffer a pang or two. First love is like one's first toothache, but change of scene, change of life, change of companionship, all these would prove of inestimable service. He would soon forget."

The Professor ruffled his grey locks, and surveyed his counsellor with doubtful eyes.

"It is so long ago since I was young!" he said, and sighed. "You ought to know more of these matters than I do," he went on presently. "I must trust you. You advise a change of scene for Horace?'

"I think the sooner he is released from the temptation of breaking his word the better," answered the counsellor.

"I have an important piece of work on hand," murmured the Professor regretfully. "A month certainly might see it accomplished, scarcely less."

"A month later would be too late," said Lawrence. "Send him away at once. Let me

take him. I promise to be as careful of his morals as ever you could be. But, believe me, he will be all the better for a little actual outlook into the realities of life. He cannot be always fenced in by home safeguards. It would be a useless equipment for the future, and leave him exposed to worse temptations than you dream of."

The Professor rose from his seat and paced the room to and fro, his brows knit in deep and anxious thought.

"I believe you are right, Lawrence," he said at last. "To deal with him decidedly now is to save him much future suffering. Decide for me. I leave it all to you. Let him see the world, let him judge what life is, and bring him back to me —cured."

The counsellor rose, a flash of triumph in his eyes.

"You will not allow his mother to interfere with this arrangement?" he suggested. "She will not like parting with him."

"Ah," said the Professor thoughtfully, "I forgot his mother. No, as you say, she will not like it. But she will see it is for his good, and her affection for Horace has its sense of justice as well as its sentiment. I think I can answer for Mrs. Wilberforce."

"Very well. Now I will find Horace and will break your intention to him."

"Not to-night, perhaps," said the Professor pleadingly. "Let him have his sleep in peace. I feel sorry for the boy—still, as you say, it would never do. No—it would never, never do. Best nip it in the bud."

Horace woke to a new morning with a bruised, stunned feeling weighing on heart and brain.

For a while he could not remember why joy had winged its flight, and the usual summer brightness seemed but a grey world to gaze upon.

Love was no longer a rare and precious blossom opening for his eyes alone, but a roughly-handled plant, desecrated by alien touches of common-sense. With aching head and heavy heart he rose, thinking how cruelly soon would be the hour of parting.

Fury took hold of him, and desperation. This thing should not be. He would defy all—every one, everything—but his love he would have and keep! He descended to the garden. There Eve wandered—distraught, beautiful, subdued by grief, emotional, passionate, as early youth alone can afford to be.

We grow more chary of expending our emotions

in later years. Time has proved that they are not beneficial to the complexion, and the warning of a wrinkle is a thousandfold more potent than the voice of wisdom.

Tumultuously they paced the sheltered walks, a thousand times they vowed eternal truth. Dragons were defied, and parental mandates scorned ; meet they should and would, despite a million obstacles. Full tilt they drove their fiery steeds, and laughed the laugh of youth at prophesies and persuasions. The glad sunshine dispelled the gloom of night, and hope wakened with the piping birds and laughed with the brooklet's murmur.

They spent the morning hours together—no one interfered. The three elders looked on and calmly awaited the hour of doom and the re-appearance of the British seaman.

Cotton gowns and neatest of underwear had been packed into the neat school-trunk, a few books and personal treasures kept them company. A meal had been prepared of such succulent and odoriferous fare as the heart of the seafarer rejoiceth in, and the housekeeper's room beheld [illegible] feast spre[illegible] and the good ale sparkling, and D[illegible] hover[illegible] round as ministering angel, with [illegible] heart-softener entrusted to her kee[illegible]

But the stern probity of the wo[illegible] was proof against all such

spatched the meal, he quaffed the ale, he listened to the wily suggestions of temporising with the situation — but his eye only glanced at the tempters, and his decision went forth in unqualified phraseology. "It be all darned nonsense, and what I says I means. I've told 'em to 'drop it,' and drop it they must, until so be in time to come, if age being suitable, and consent not wantin' on the part of parties most consarned, they says, 'True we've been and true we means to be, and now for better or for worse we plight our troth.'"

He delivered himself of this speech with the complacency of a born orator; then demanded his daughter, and with a ceremonious farewell to the Professor and his wife, and a parting injunction to Horace to remember he was "on his honour," and that the eye of a watchful parent was upon him from henceforth, he conducted a sullenly submissive captive to her new home.

Then desolation fell upon the disconsolate youth, and he rushed forth to woodland solitudes to hide his grief.

The intention was checked half-way by a meeting with Dick, to whom in frank confidence, and the new importance of an everlasting misery, he poured forth his distraught soul.

Dick was amazed at the turn events had taken,

more amazed at his friend's distancing himself on the field of emotion in so brief a space of time. They called philosophy to their aid, and debated schemes that showed them wiser in their own conceit than any Macchiavelli or Moltke of strategy in camp or senate.

That all this wisdom passed by the gates of material benefit was, of course, an unimportant matter. It did them good to talk, and they talked. They derided common-sense; they mocked at scruples based on such trivial accidents as difference of station. Was she not beautiful, virginal, pure, and loving? Could mortal man ask more of his mate to be?

Dick hovered about the subject on wings of wider experience and a knowledge attained by the lore of college youths. Horace listened, a little shocked, a little doubtful; but his tastes were not morbid, and the sparkle of pure water still charmed his lips. He shook off truths of physiology as unsightly cobwebs clinging to the white statue of his Una. Passion was still impersonal, and the knee bent at the shrine, even while the eyes looked upward at its glories.

That talk did them no harm; mystery is more dangerous to youth than open discussion. Dick had sense as well as experience. He knew exactly how much the mental fastidiousness of his young

Achates could bear, and he gave it but a light burden.

They were both confronting an ordeal. They left heroics after a time, and dipped into Arcadian coolness. They rang the changes on the music of "some day" that was to astonish the world by a picture of unfettered constancy—the constancy of pure spirits, recognising each other's beauty, and content to await fuller revelations in the ripeness of time.

"Five years," sighed the boy. "Oh, Dick, you have the best of it!"

"I've known fellows marry at twenty," said Dick. "And you were never very young, you know, Horry."

"No," he agreed; "and I feel old enough now."

They turned their steps homeward. The groves were melancholy; the birds sang out of tune; the sunset glories had lost all radiance.

David Lawrence saw them in the distance, and again the smile of knowledge crossed his lips. He could guess what that hour had held, and already detected the signs of resignation in the face of his pupil.

The science of consolation as bestowed by youth on youth presented itself to him as the true epic of poesy. He joined them, and before long a laugh

echoed through the twilight shadows; a faint smile lifted the down-dropped corners of melancholy lips, forsworn already of a vow that held mirth as a foe to cherished sorrow.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ORDEAL.

GRADUALLY and subtly the counsellor dropped the honey of "possible consolation" to the love-sick youth. With wary words and delicate hints he led his thoughts from Arcadia to a world beyond its groves, but a pleasant world withal. A distaste for study was followed by a love of moping. The tutor recognised a crisis, and acted on it. At first Horace would hear naught. Travel, see the world, know the life of gay cities, where love no longer piped? Perish the idea!

Lawrence did not press the subject at once. He knew the ways of youth, and bided opportunity.

It came at last. Dick was called away to Sandhurst; the lover had no sympathising confidant any longer. When the suggestion of Paris was again whispered, he listened more, and protested less. Soon he protested not at all, but desired his mother to pack his traps, and announced he was ready to depart. It would pass the time, he re-

flected, the weary, leaden-footed time that must part true love from true love.

Enjoyment of a holiday — a holiday amidst strange scenes and strange people—was of course impossible. That was a disloyalty on which he never dwelt. Melancholy had marked him for its own, and to that plaintive goddess he vowed his newly-granted freedom. Absolute study was forbidden for a time, but of books he took a fair share. Mythology had acquired a new charm, and the Siege of Troy was now a classic revelation of the worth and loveliness of his own particular Helen. Poetry, too, he revelled in, and even wrote. All young lovers are poets at heart; most of them are copyists also.

It was not the time of year to enjoy Paris, though the British tourist had apparently marked it for his own. Horace did the sights religiously, but blushed at stage indecencies, and clung closer to his mentor's side in the Closerie de Lilas, and the freedom of *cafés chantants*. His unripe tastes recoiled from the worship of vice in the city that elects to do it honour.

They wandered further afield, and dropped anchor at last in fair Lucerne.

In the lazy enjoyment of lake and mountain the first benefit of Change began to manifest itself. To those to whom her charms are new, and by whom

they have been rarely wooed, she is indeed a maid of hope and promise. The smile of melancholy passed into a laugh, and the laugh no longer jarred on the laugher's senses, or held the harsh note of disdain. The wise counsellor noted every sign and grew hopeful. He was an admirable companion, and had an abundant sense of humour. This genial transformation, so fresh and innocently grave withal, moved him to secret mirth, and pleased him too by its tribute to his own powers of discernment. He planned mountaineering excursions in the glacier regions, and August found them at Davos Platz, and promised to Horace an entirely novel and delightful recreation.

He equipped himself with the zeal of the adventurer, and the only tribute he paid to hopeless passion was to carry in his coat pocket a small volume of Byron. It frequently returned home unopened. The life of the mountains, that delicious revelling in air keen and sweet in one, intoxicating as champagne, divine as nectar, held him in its spell. The intense blue sky, the wondrous wooded ravines, the crystal-gleaming ice, the far-off mantling snows, all these affected him with that vague sense of wonder and delight that is almost painful to a first experience. It lifted him out of himself, it showed him pigmy man beside giant Nature. It spoke out in the grand reverberating music of a limitless

past, sending forth its echoes to an equally limitless eternity.

His own life, his puny achievements, his selfish dreams suddenly flashed before him in the colours of self-recognition. All that man must have hoped for, worked for, and achieved faced him as a revelation, and shamed him as a result. In those grand, calm solitudes, life seemed of such small account, a thing that mocked effort and smiled at time, pointing to untrodden summits, whispering of uncountable years. Here stood man with his little hopes and dreams; there, before, behind, around, those wondrous heights stretched to the heaven of which he dreamt, bathed in the amber glory of a sunrise or a sunset that for once made the "New Jerusalem" a poem for the most sceptical to believe in.

The tutor stood apart at this juncture, and let Nature do her work. No physician so skilful, no healing power so sure.

"If his love outlives *this*, it is love indeed," he thought. "But if it be but a boy's dream, he will go home cured."

Meanwhile, the forsaken maiden sat at her cottage door, and raged wildly against the cruelty of Fate.

Her nature was more passionate, and alert, and

intense, than that of her lover. Joy and grief lashed her to sharper issues, thrilled her senses with keener bliss or pain. When she heard that he had left—not only home, but England—she refused to believe it. Her father brought her the news with a grim content in its possibilities. When he mentioned the possibilities she—in his picturesque phraseology—"flew at him like a wild cat."

But the storm soon passed. She was still so young that "moods" were hardly superior to childish tempers, and, like them, quick to come, slow to stay. Yet the fact of his absence threw a colder shadow over her uncongenial life. There seemed nothing to look forward to now. Her father's vigilance had stood like an indefatigable sentinel between visit or communication from Broomville. No message had reached her, no sight of that dear boyish face gladdened her watching eyes. Silence, like a blank wall, lay between their two lives, and she lost her hold on hope at last.

It struck her father that, far from contributing to the comforts of his life, she stood considerably in the way of it. A kindly neighbour gave her all possible household assistance; but though an apt pupil, she was an uncertain one. Her father

was not an unkind man, with all his roughness, and bore with her very patiently.

"She'll fret a bit, of course," he told himself. "But 'twon't last. She'll settle down and be a good darter, and marry in her own rank when time comes, as is best for all parties."

Her toss of head, and the fierce "Never" that met such a suggestion, in quiet evening hours sacred to meditation and tobacco, only amused him the more. He treated her as a child, and bore with her with wondrous patience. These flashes of rage —the outcome of a past ancestry of errant devilry —brought back other memories, and half-puzzled, half-pleased him.

"You're the very moral o' your mother," he would say, and let her flame out as fiercely as her heart desired, for the mere pleasure of recalling stormy experiences.

Gradually, as the weeks slipped by, she threw off her sullen discontent, and took to accompanying him on his fishing expeditions round the coast. The sea held still its old charm for her. To swim in its depths, to fly with swift-winged sail outspread to the strong breeze, to rock on its heaving bosom in grey dawns—shared only by the birds and the sunlight—these were pleasures to which her soul responded, and in which the purely youthful delight of living asserted itself.

She grew familiar with every feature of the coast, every line of the dark red cliffs, the little sandy bays. Her father encouraged her love for the sea, and was proud of her skill in handling sail or oar, her fearlessness of storm, her tireless powers of endurance. The vivid intensity of her nature turned itself into a new channel, and the long days grew less wearisome, and the nights brought her the hard-won sleep of sheer bodily fatigue.

The kindly neighbour warned her father at times that the girl worked too hard, and ate too little, that the slight figure had grown amazingly thin, and the peach-like cheeks a trifle paler than of yore. But he only laughed. The girl was strong and well enough. She was growing fast, and all young things grew wiry and weedy when they grew. The woman said no more; but she had had a daughter once and saw her fade and grow pale and spiritless, and weaker day by day, and fear made her keen-sighted when a maid's welfare was concerned.

As the summer waned, and storms grew more frequent, and the seas more often rough than calm, her father bade her stay in the cottage again, and go back to the woman's work of washing and mending and household toil. She obeyed, because of late it seemed less trouble to obey than to

dispute, but the long days, the empty hours, the gossip of the fishermen's wives, oppressed her as they had never done before.

How long it seemed since that golden June, how long since he had left. And there had come no word or sign in those weary months. She appeared utterly forgotten. The fields were bare now, the harvest gathered. The first chill days of October

had set in with rain and stormy winds. The cottage garden was a sodden mass of draggled stems, and the sturdy blooms no longer redeemed its barren path. The small window of the one parlour and kitchen combined looked seaward through rain-dabbled panes.

Her eyes grew weary of the dismal prospect, grey with mists one way, red with miry clay where

the cliff path wound upwards to pine woods and fir-clothed heights. Down that path no messenger ever came. It stretched up beyond, like the promise it had never fulfilled. It was but another emblem of desolation to the tired eyes, wherein hope's light no longer shone. One of the old tempestuous mists of passion shook her as she looked at it one afternoon.

"I can't bear it; I will go to the house; I must see them — hear something. They promised I should go. Have they all forgotten?"

A longing for Mrs. Wilberforce's kindly face and gentle voice came over her. She was his mother —the best substitute for himself. She would know something. At least, to hear his name spoken would be a little consolation, a recompense for these weary months of utter silence.

She threw on a rough tweed cloak, and drew the hood round her face with its lovely chestnut curls. Her large eyes glowed with excitement. She left her father's evening meal ready for his return, and put a fresh log on the fire; then she went out into the cold wet gloom, her feet winged by desire, her heart warm with hope once more.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RESULT.

MRS. WILBERFORCE sat alone in the dusk of the firelit room, a letter from her beloved boy clasped in her hand. She knew it all by heart, for it was a day old already; but it would be read and re-read till another came to replace it.

She missed him more than any words could tell; her heart ached for his presence as day by day increased the length of separation, and still no word of return was breathed.

It was their first separation, and added to its dreary sense of loss there had fallen upon her of late a subtle feeling of change in their hitherto frank confidence and close relationship.

It was something she could not have expressed even to the boy himself, but it was a very real something, and as she sat alone in this one hour of day that was peculiarly sacred to his memory; slow, hot tears crept to her eyes and dropped on the open page on her knee.

The door suddenly opened. There was a gleam of light as the footman brought in a lamp and placed it on the table. She did not turn her head, half-ashamed of foolish weakness that would betray itself. So when a soft touch made her start, she was surprised to find that a visitor had entered with the light. Her first words were more amazed than welcoming. The girl threw back her hood, and gazed with eager eyes at the familiar face. The sign of tears did not escape her quick perceptions.

"Dear Mrs. Wilberforce, what is it? Don't tell me he is ill—that anything has happened!"

The old lady drew herself up a little stiffly. "My dear, you have quite taken me by surprise. I—I hadn't anticipated a visit from you without some intimation."

"Oh, for goodness' sake, don't drive me wild by forms and ceremonies and long words!" cried the girl, in her old impetuous fashion. "I'm simply dying to hear of Horace. I had to come! Not a word, not one word all these weary months! Ah! Is that a letter? I know it is! I know his writing. Oh, let me read it; do please let me read it! Oh, my dear, my own dear, to think your hand touched these pages!"

She fell on her knees and kissed the thin sheets of foreign paper with passionate lips. "Oh, is

there a word, a message for me anywhere in you?" she cried, and crushed the letter to her throbbing breast as if it were a sentient thing.

"Calm yourself, my dear," exclaimed Mrs. Wilberforce; "of course you can read it. I have no objection. I—I am afraid it isn't what you expect; but—"

Her words fell on heedless ears. The girl's eyes were devouring page after page. When she reached the last, she turned and looked at the mother's face in pure bewilderment.

"It's—not—a letter," she cried stormily. "It's a book, an essay, a cold-blooded hateful piece of cleverness; sextants, gradients, elevations, glacier ascents—why, there isn't a bit of Horace himself in the whole letter!" ("Nor a word of me," said her heart, as its wild throbs died out into the dull ache of an old pain.)

Mrs. Wilberforce was silent. Her instincts had not been at fault, then; there was a change. She dried the tears in her eyes, and composed her voice to cheerfulness.

"Travelling is so new to him, and mountaineering, I have always heard, is strangely alluring. He is quite full of it, at present."

"Full of it!" echoed the girl passionately. "Yes, that is a boy all over; that is what a man becomes! Full of every new fad and fancy, every

new conceit, every new exploit! And we girls and women can only sit at home, and break our hearts for them!"

"It is nature," said the mother meekly. "The active life for them, the passive for us. For them strife, for us endurance."

"Is it nature to forget?" the girl cried. "If Horace wrote this he has forgotten. See here," she caught the letter up and turned it rapidly: "'When the weather breaks, and we have to give up our expeditions, we shall return to Italy, and pass the winter in Rome or Venice. I do not care to return to England till the spring. Mr. Lawrence proposes some plan of work which I am anxious to carry out. My health is considerably improved. I have grown two inches. You would hardly know me.'

"'I do not care to return till the spring,'" she quoted, as she flung the sheet on the ground. "Not a word of regret, not a message, not a question!"

"Boys' memories are rarely faithful," observed Mrs. Wilberforce.

"You sent him away; you made him go. You wanted him to forget," cried the girl, in the old fierce way. "I don't blame him, I blame you. It's nothing to you, any of you, what becomes of me, how wretched I am, whether I die, or—"

"Oh, my dear, hush," pleaded the old lady gently.

"You are unjust to say I don't care. I have thought of you constantly. I have taken pains to learn of your welfare. It seemed to me that you were less unhappy; that you were growing accustomed to the change. I deemed it best not to recall old associations yet, but I never forgot you, or lost interest in your life and actions."

"I don't believe it!" she flamed out fiercely. "You are all equally cold-blooded and heartless. As for Horace—"

She tossed back the rich curls from her face; her eyes glowed like live coals. "Keep him!" she cried contemptuously; "chill his heart with wisdom; kill all the youth out of him; turn him into stone or ice, as you have been trying to do! I want flesh and blood; something to love, and to love me; something that won't forget, because—oh, God!—it *cant.*"

A sob caught her voice. She dragged the wet hood over her head once more, and without a word or glance of farewell, she flung herself out of the room, and into the dark and tempestuous night.

The rain was still falling heavily. The wind had risen, and moaned dismally through the leafless trees. The girl flew along with breathless speed, hounded by that one sense of burning indignation against all mankind.

Fierce showers blotted out the light of the moon, though it was at its full. Stronger and stronger grew the rising wind. She noted neither one nor other as she sped along the miry road that led seawards.

"Not a word, not one little word in all these months—and he won't return till the spring! He could come back if he wished, but he won't. And after all his promises!"

It seemed to her she had never looked forward so keenly to his return as since he himself had deferred it; never so confidently expected her name to figure in his letters as since she had read those closely covered pages in his writing. But all her hopes were thrust back like a dead weight on her heart, and despair seized her in its grim clutch at last.

Absence had indeed served its purpose, and that speedily. How wise they had been, these arbiters of her fate! There was no need to dread the future now. Three months had sufficed to cure one love-fever. How long, she dimly wondered, would it take to cure the other?

All her sympathies were for herself. She was too young to reason. Blind in her loves and hates, and guided but by hereditary impulses of recklessness and passion, she suffered even as she enjoyed, with her whole power of will.

Years before, such impulse had foreshadowed a tragedy. It recurred now as a temptation to avenge herself on all these heartless conspirators. How sorry they would be if they knew to what they had driven her! How sorry if—

She stopped, breathless and panting. The wild moan of the sea was distinctly audible. It never made that noise except when a storm was at hand. She thought of her father, and wondered if he was at home; then hastened on once more, stumbling ever and again over objects that the darkness made invisible, yet threading her way along the wooded cliffs with wonderful dexterity, till she reached the narrow footpath that led downwards to the fishing village.

Arrived there, she found the men gathered in a knot about the stone jetty. Lanterns were flashing, and voices raised in eager discussion. She crept up noiselessly, a dark, slim figure, observed by none. She soon ascertained the subject of this commotion. The fishing-boats had all returned save one—the *Dolphin*. It had been seen, just before the squall came on, rounding a rock that stood far out in the sea; a huge rugged block which once must have been united to the mainland, but was now separated from it by a mile or more of rough and broken sea dashing over a jagged reef shunned by boats and fishing-smacks alike.

The girl listened. A faint thrill of alarm ran through her as she heard. Well enough she knew that spot, its dangerous currents, its swirling tides. To be near it, and overtaken by a storm like this, meant grave danger.

From time to time the men flashed their lanterns out over the seething sea, but no sign of boat or sound of voice came across the darkness. Then the voices grew graver.

"If he'd done it he'd have been in by now," they said, and shook heads and spoke of the man's well-known skill and good seamanship.

The girl stood there like a statue. A new suggestion reached her ear, and claimed her sudden attention.

"If the boat struck," it said, "and he were by chance pitched out there, he'd be on the rock like eno'."

She darted forward then, and they drew back, startled at her presence.

"Oh, let us go and seek him," she cried passionately. "If he is there, all alone, on that awful place, we must help; we can't leave him to die! Oh, don't wait; don't look like that! Think, if it was one of you, how quick he'd be to lend a hand to help!"

"The girl says true," observed a rough old salt, "but who's a-goin' to volunteer?"

"I'll go for one," she cried. "You know I can manage a boat as well as any one of you."

"You—a chip of a gall!"

They laughed her to scorn; still no one else offered. Most of them were men with wives and families; risk was a serious matter.

Her tongue lashed them as cowards. She flew

to one stalwart youth, whom she knew by repute as a skilful boatman.

"You come, Tom," she entreated. "Surely, if I'm not afraid you needn't be. The gale is abating already. Once we're through the surf it will be easy to make way."

"Ay, ay, but it's just the surf that's so nasty," said the youth. "I'm willing eno' to venture, but

I doubt we'll need stronger arms than yours for the job."

Remonstrances showered upon both. Folly *versus* Wisdom listened with its usual disdain. At last another man threw in his vote of assistance, and the trio hastened to the boat deemed most seaworthy. The girl flew to her place like a lapwing to a twig.

They had promised she should steer, although the task seemed hopeless in such a sea. A dozen willing hands helped to launch the boat, but it was nearly swamped despite their skill. It shipped so much water that the girl had to bale out while the strong arms guided it over each roaring crest that threatened destruction. When they were well out to sea, the task was less difficult. From time to time they flashed the light over the wide waste around. Near as the Gull Rock looked from the shore, it lay a good two miles west of the Point, and the task of reaching it was well-nigh hopeless. Midway on their desperate journey, the heavy clouds suddenly lightened, and gleams of moon or star shone through the rift. They bent to their task in desperate silence.

"The wind has dropped," cried the girl suddenly; "and the rock's in sight," she added. "Look!"

It was in sight, and they were bearing down upon it at a rate that threatened danger to them-

selves. Their lungs gave forth one mighty shout; their anxious hearts awaited response. The girl's quick ears were first to catch a sound. It was faint, but it was hopeful. She sprang to her feet, forgetful of her duty. A warning cry reached her, but that moment's inadvertence had brought the boat broadside to a huge advancing wave. It towered above like some avenging monster; an oar snapped, the boat heeled over, the roaring mass of water poured over it, and in a second the hapless crew were at the mercy of the fierce sea, while

the boat itself was engulfed in the trough of angry waters. In its downward passage it struck the girl's head. With the cry of agony that floated out on the stormy night, all consciousness forsook her. Her hair trailed out on the white crest of a wave; it lifted her like a cork on its summit, and then tossed the lithe young body on the cruel, jagged reef where clung the man she had gone to save.

He felt the damp garments brush his face. His own strength was almost gone now; his hands were

numbed and bleeding, his frame bruised and half-frigid with cold and long exposure. Yet the feeling of who this was that had come to his rescue nerved him with fresh life. He clutched the dripping garments, and tried to steady the slight frame on the ridge the tide was fast forsaking. Soon it would be dry, and morning would bring rescue. He spoke her name faintly, but with hope and praise of her courage.

There was no answer. The sea she had loved so well had stilled her voice for evermore.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LESSON LEARNT.

HEIGHT upon height the great mountains towered, the dazzling white melting with the dazzling blue. It was close on sunset; so close that already the west was rose and gold, and every moment marked a deeper radiance, a more exquisite feast of colour.

Horace Wilberforce stood alone on a lofty peak of the smaller chain extending from the Upper Engadine Valley. He was leaning on his alpenstock and watching, with eyes still untired of Nature's alchemy, the wondrous hues and changes of the day's farewell. One long pathway of glittering rays stretched bridge-like from height of earth to gate of heaven. As he gazed it seemed to him that the old fantasy of a path of light for wandering souls was less a myth than a possibility.

He gazed and gazed, until it seemed as if his very soul went out of him, and sped along with glittering arc on wings of longing.

Where did it stretch? What would it reach?

His eyes grew dim for very ecstasy, his life seemed absorbed by the intensity of feeling. It was his last evening here, and the sadness of parting mingled with the delight the beautiful spectacle could not but arouse.

Softly the light began to fade. The rose-coloured snows paled to grey, and took back their old colourless purity; the glowing amber changed to purple, and then grew darkly blue. A deep sigh parted the boy's lips. It was his farewell.

He turned slowly away. He had climbed here to get the best view, leaving David Lawrence below.

With the sure, light foot of youth he trod the slippery ice, and sprang across the unequal ground. The keen air blew across his face, and ruffled the air about his brow. But a feeling of sadness and intense loneliness was paramount; his thoughts rushed homewards on sudden wings of longing, and for the first time he realised the extent of absence.

His monitor's keen eyes took note of the change when the boy again joined him. What had he seen on those heights yonder? What wand-like touch had melted the grosser being within him, dispelled the hardness, etherealised the spirit? Was it sensation merely, or revelation with which he had now to deal?

They left the mountains and entered a wood,

dark with close-growing pine and fir, full now of twilight shadows. Here, suddenly, the boy paused.

"Mr. Lawrence," he said, "I want to go home."

The tutor looked at him in silence. In his heart he said: "Ah! it was revelation, then."

"To go home?" he echoed presently. "To give up our Italian scheme? Why, Horace?"

The boy's eyes sought the ground. When he spoke his voice was choked; his words fell out in eager bursts, in a pell-mell hurried fashion, unlike his late unemotional mode of speech.

"I can't explain. It seems to have been coming on by degrees. A sort of sick longing to see them all — to see *her*. Don't laugh, Mr. Lawrence. It may seem ridiculous—you've tried your best to make it so, and I've seemed to believe you, but all the time it's been against myself. And suddenly, as I stood there and looked at all that, a great wave of longing came over me, and nothing seemed to matter, and nothing seemed of much account except just — love. God meant it—Nature teaches it; our hearts can't do without it. I've obeyed you all; I've done my best. But to-day, to-night—I don't know how to put it—she's knocking at the very door of my soul. I feel she wants me; she's lonely and unhappy. Perhaps she thinks I've forgotten, and

oh, she did love me so! Ah! don't smile, Mr. Lawrence, for God's sake don't smile. I'm a boy no longer; I mean every word I say. I've kept my promise to you all. Not a word, not a message have I sent her. But to-night I seemed to hear her voice crying to me out there on those lonely mountains; I seemed to feel she was wanting me as I want—her."

Then he broke down. The pent-up longings of these past months took vengeance on repressed emotion. Excitement of blood and brain demanded toll of defied nature.

A great sob tore at his chest, and his shamed, streaming eyes hid themselves suddenly. Then quick as thought he dragged his cap over his eyes, and plunged into the dark silence of the woods.

David Lawrence stood there silent, remorseful.

"I've done my best," he said. "Who would have dreamt the arrow had gone so deep?"

At the hotel a packet of letters and papers were awaiting them. He put them on one side while he sat down to notify change of plans, and announce the wanderers' speedy return.

The cure had not worked. He hinted as much, and also suggested a new policy of discretion. Let things be as of old—withdraw active opposi-

tion. Perchance love would die of too much sweetness as certainly as of starvation itself.

The letters occupied him for long. He wrote humorously to the Professor, sympathisingly to his wife, gravely and with all reasonable arguments to the Heavy Father.

Then with a sigh of relief he turned to the unopened correspondence. A letter for Horace from his mother, one for himself from the Professor, and a local newspaper. He opened it first. A marked paragraph caught his eye.

"Tragic disaster at Tor Point. Severe storm and loss of life."

He ran his eyes over the account with more curiosity than interest. Gradually his face changed. A look of horror and dismay crept into it. He threw the paper down, and turned to the letter. As he tore it open, the door opened and Horace entered.

Lawrence's first intention was to keep the newspaper from his sight. He drew his attention to his mother's epistle. The boy's face grew bright.

"Ah, she never forgets," he said. "But what's the paper for, Mr. Lawrence?"

He had evidently resumed his usual composure. A slight redness of the eyes, an unusual flush on his tanned cheek, alone betrayed recent excitement. Utterly at a loss what to do, the tutor

watched him seize the paper, run his eyes carelessly over its columns.

There came a cry, a breath of agony closed by livid lips.

"Dead! . . . O God!—dead!"

All the woe of youth, all the loss of love, all the horrors of grief echoed in that cry. The faint autumn wind sighing by open windows carried it forth to the silver snows. The heart it left seemed in one moment to have grown chill and dead even as they.

There was a long, long silence. Words were useless. Fate had averted one catastrophe by another. Wise age, sorrowful youth, what were they but puppets in a Master-Hand that dealt them blows with calm impartiality?

The show was over; the curtain had fallen. Love was but a dream, so the wise audience had decreed. With the fall of the curtain the play was at an end. "Let us go home," they said.

Grief struck the key-notes of nature. The mother's sweet entreaty, "Come to me," found ready response.

On that fond bosom let the boy weep tears that are no shame, recount the deed of heroism that received an angel's guerdon, make his moan, and utter all the full heart bears, and has borne.

No reproach falls in this sacred chamber. Sorrow, like a charmed "hush" from a watcher's sick-bed, keeps guard without, and dimly wonders wherein lies the secret of woman's consolation.

But sorrow, in the shape of grey hairs and sage brain, for whose pity no claim is made, can only repeat the Professor's old formula, "I believe in mothers."

THE END.

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